

Discerning Ways to Better Support Hispanic Students from Low SES Backgrounds at  
Brophy College Preparatory

by

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## ABSTRACT

As a ninth-grade English teacher at Brophy College Preparatory Academy, I always looked toward the end of the school year with a certain amount of anticipation and trepidation. The anticipation celebrated students who had successfully completed their freshman year; whereas the trepidation resulted from the end-of-year memo indicating which students had chosen not to return to Brophy next year. Unfortunately, the latter group included a disproportionate number of Hispanic students from low-SES backgrounds. Given Brophy valued diversity and the terrific abilities of these students, an innovation was devised to foster development of ‘school-navigation’ skills to assist students in adapting to the social and academic demands of the school.

The intervention was rooted in several theoretical frameworks including Bourdieu’s (1977) Cultural Capital Perspective, McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) Sense of Community Theory, and Duckworth’s (2007) Grit Framework. Sixteen freshmen and four 12<sup>th</sup>-grade mentors participated in the study. The 12-week innovation incorporated four topics—transitioning to high school, learning about strategies for academic success, becoming involved in school culture and community, and working more effectively with teachers. Each topic was considered in a 3-week cycle. During week 1, students participated in a large group discussion about the topic led by the researcher. Subsequently, they wrote in journals to reflect on the topic. During week 2, four small groups of four freshmen and one senior, mentor met to consider the topics. Mentors led discussions and also shared how they had coped with the topic. Again, freshmen wrote in journals. In week 3, freshmen met in a large group with the researcher and shared their

reflections and their experiences. In this context, the freshmen learned from each other and realized they were all experiencing similar challenges that could be overcome with grit and a community to support them.

Qualitative results indicated freshmen developed a sense of community, learned to respond in positive ways to failure, and developed academic and social school-navigation skills. Freshmen and mentors became tightly knit communities, texting each other with questions coming from freshmen and responses from mentors. The discussion focused on how the theoretical frameworks were useful in understanding the results.

## DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my wonderful wife and children. Their names are Kim, Jack, Sophie, and Noey. And, to my mom, Suzanne.

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## Chapter 1

### LARGER AND LOCAL CONTEXT AND INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

The pronoun I plays a prevalent role in the Horatio Alger tales of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*I pulled myself up by my bootstraps.*

*I meant to turn over a new leaf.*

*I was determined to leave the poorhouse.*

Alger's vision of the American dream and how to attain it has been mythologized over the last 150 years or so (Kanfer, 2000). There was some merit to what he wrote about. There has been a relation between hard work and success. This was something that Angela Duckworth has written about recently in her book *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. Duckworth (2016) wrote,

In sum, no matter the domain, the highly successful had a kind of ferocious determination that played out in two ways. First, these exemplars were unusually resilient and hardworking. Second, they knew in a very deep way what it was they wanted. They not only had determination, they had a direction.” (p. 8)

The previous quotation described well Alger's protagonists like Jed, the poorhouse boy, or Ragged Dick, a bootblack who rose up to “respectability” due to his hard work and determination (Kanfer).

Hard work matters. Determination matters. Grit matters, in 2017, when students attempt to find success in school. Without a doubt, having grit has been shown to influence whether or not a young man or woman will do well in school. That having been said, Horatio Alger's tales of success have been mythologized because they focused

too much on the protagonist. They focused too much on the pronoun I. No student has achieved success alone. No student's success was pre-determined in a vacuum. Yes, success has been predicated on hard work and determination, but in the rearview mirror of an American success story, a community of support could be observed that has consistently encouraged and aided the student who has pulled himself or herself up by those proverbial bootstraps.

Albert Peterson in the late 1950s Broadway musical *Bye Bye Birdie* apparently had it right. In terms of high school dropout rates, gray skies *are* going to clear up. Recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014) indicated, "Between 1990 and 2012, the male status dropout rate declined from 12 to 7 percent, with most of the decline taking place after 2000 (when it was 12 percent)." Metaphorically speaking, it seemed the skies were blue or at least trending blue as more and more students attained high school degrees. The trends have been so positive that even national magazines have been caught up in the data. Emily Richmond (2013) wrote in *The Atlantic*, "The nation's high school graduation rate is approaching 75 percent, its highest rate in 40 years."

Additionally, these positive trends have held true in terms of non-Caucasian ethnic groups of students who traditionally have struggled or lagged behind with respect to attaining a high school degree: "Significant jumps in the percentages of black and Latino students graduating were an important factor in the improved nationwide graduation rate" (Richmond, 2013). The NCES (2014) has reported,

In each year from 1990 to 2012, the status dropout rate was lower for Whites than for Blacks and Hispanics. During this period, the rate for Whites declined from 9 to 4 percent; the rate for Blacks declined from 13 to 8 percent; and the rate for Hispanics declined from 32 to 13 percent. As a result, the gap between Whites and Hispanics narrowed from 23 percentage points in 1990 to 8 percentage points in 2012. While the rates for both Whites and Blacks declined during this period, the gap between the rates in 1990 was not measurably different from the gap between the rates in 2012. (p. 1)

For clarification's sake, the NCES explained the dropout rate "represents the percentage of 16- through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an equivalency credential such as a General Educational Development [GED] certificate)." That having been said, the question remained, do these national trends mirror what is going on in the state of Arizona?

In terms of Arizona as compared to national trends, *The Washington Post* (2013) reported, "Across the country, a total of 514,238 public school students dropped out of high school in the 2009-10 school year. New Hampshire and Idaho had the lowest dropout rates, while Mississippi and Arizona had the highest." Additionally, according to *The Arizona Republic* (2013), "Arizona ranks ninth from the bottom in a new national report on high-school graduation rates." That does not mean Arizona's dropout rates were not trending in a positive direction. Again, *The Arizona Republic* explained,

The report shows that Arizona's graduation numbers have improved by more than 5 percent since 2000, when the state had an average graduation rate of 62.2

percent. Nationally, the high-school graduation rate is up 7.9 percent in the same time period.

The national and state data on graduation rates were positive, and yet it certainly can be seen that there was more work to do.

### **Local Context**

I work at Brophy College Prep, a private Jesuit high school in downtown Phoenix. It has been my hope that as a high school English teacher, I have been contributing to the upward trends of graduation rates in our state. Still, each year, I have noticed that students leave Brophy, and I would like to discern ways to help them remain at my school. Though it has been somewhat of a challenge to discern commonalities between, for instance, a Caucasian high school dropout in Maine and a young Hispanic boy at my school, there may be common threads, which, if uncovered, could assist in retaining students at Brophy. Further, I anticipate that barriers to retention may be mitigated by developing and implementing an intervention that would support students more fully.

### **Background**

Brophy admits about 340 students to their freshman class on a yearly basis. Of those students, most have come from affluent families living in homes near the school. Nevertheless, with each recent passing year, Brophy has recruited students from the west and south sides of Phoenix. These students are traditionally Hispanic. They come from low socio-economic homes, and they receive financial aid because the tuition of the private school would be prohibitive otherwise. In the past few years, Hispanic students have made up approximately 25% of an incoming ninth-grade class. By contrast, about

60% are Caucasian. In the context of the 340 admitted, Hispanic students number somewhere around eighty to ninety each year. At the close of a school year, the withdrawals traditionally were not egregious. It is not as if half of the Hispanic ninth-grade students left Brophy. The number was close to twelve to fifteen. Nonetheless, this number of students was disproportionate when compared with the number of affluent Caucasian students who left Brophy after their first year – that number would be closer to three. I think that even one Hispanic student who left Brophy after his first year was too many.

The withdrawal notices each year were symptomatic of something at Brophy with which there needed to be systematic examination and a powerful remedy. Thus, the initial question was: why do Hispanic students who come to the school from low SES backgrounds disproportionately leave Brophy after their first year when compared to their more affluent Caucasian counterparts? After that question, another compelling question was what can be done to remedy this situation?

Hispanic students who have come to Brophy from low socioeconomic backgrounds typically live in south or west Phoenix and have attended public grammar schools. Brophy sends administrative recruiters to public schools in search of students who could potentially handle the academic rigors of the college preparatory environment. Hispanic students from these public schools have been gifted, and they were leaders within their school community. Their teachers often recommended Brophy to them because they thought so highly of them. Still, these students' giftedness was often something the teachers could not cultivate because of the diverse academic abilities of all

students in their classes. Thus, these high-achieving Hispanic students may not have been exposed to a challenging academic curriculum.

In terms of their peers, community, and neighborhoods, these students were often chided for their intelligence, and when they considered attending Brophy, they faced additional negative pressures. Brophy is an all-male school, and often these students who attended the school were made fun of because of this fact. They faced slurs and, additionally, they encountered their peers and members of their neighborhood community questioning them about “selling out,” forgetting their roots, or turning their backs on their neighborhood. These matters were not something Caucasian students from north and central Phoenix faced. Instead, these students were lauded or admired for their academic prowess. Negative peer pressure from friends and elders within a neighborhood environment could have been draining, especially in the context of these students coming to a new school with more homework and a more challenging curriculum.

Hispanic students who attended Brophy from west and south Phoenix typically have had families who supported their decision to take on this endeavor, but their overall family environment may have presented some challenges, as well. Mothers or fathers may have worked long hours to support the family. The student may have had to care for younger siblings, which was not typical of other students, while the mother and father worked. Brophy has been a one-to-one computing school where students were given iPads for use in classrooms and to take home to complete homework. Some students may not have had an internet connection at their home, and so homework completion may have become an issue. In short, students’ family environments may be wholly supportive

from a psychological point of view, but familial and economic constraints may have prevented students from being able to concentrate their efforts on academics.

### **The Withdrawal Scenario and a Response**

The last few days of a school year have been traditionally been infused with feelings of joy and accomplishment. At Brophy, this has been no different. The one caveat on these positive feelings at the school was the looming withdrawal email sent by the administration. The communiqué was not meant to be positive or negative – it was simply meant to inform faculty members of which students had decided to leave the school. That having been said, I have viewed the email as having a negative connotation because each year without fail there would be names of students leaving the school who surprised the teachers with their departure and who the teachers were sorry to see go.

Frequently, the withdrawals were over-represented with ninth-grade Hispanic students who should not have left the school after their first year. Yes, their grades may have been a bit low. Yes, these students were known to struggle with getting all their homework completed, but these were students with an enormous amount of leadership potential who should have graduated from Brophy and gone on to be doctors and lawyers. These were the students who should have graduated and gone on to effect positive change in their communities. Yet, each year, these were the students who filled teachers with regret as they withdrew from Brophy.

### **Purpose Statement**

Thus, it was evident that Hispanic students from low SES backgrounds disproportionately left Brophy after their ninth-grade years. Because of my concern for



these students who have such great potential, I wanted to implement a community of support for these students at their new school. The purpose of my action research project was to examine the influence of implementing a “community of support” program to better facilitate the transition to Brophy of Hispanic ninth-grade students from low SES backgrounds, focusing on their engagement and relationship to the school. I involved upperclassmen mentors who were also Hispanic and who came from similar SES backgrounds. They helped to further support the freshmen because they represented successful examples of how to navigate their way through Brophy. I developed a twelve-week cycle of support and mentorship where the freshmen were asked to learn from me, to learn from their mentors, and to reflect upon all the information that they gleaned from the program. I, in turn, hoped to learn from these students ways to better support new Hispanic students who came to Brophy from low SES backgrounds.

### **Research Questions**

Given the problem of practice and the purpose presented above, the following research questions guided the conduct of this action research dissertation.

1. How and to what extent did participation in a set of community building support activities influence students’ connections to the school?
2. How and to what extent did participation in a set of community building support activities influence students’ efficacy about academic work?
3. How and to what extent did participation in a set of community building activities influence students’ social engagement with others at school?

4. How successful were (a) the community building program and (b) the mentors in the program?

## Chapter 2

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH GUIDING THE PROJECT

#### **Brief Context and Introduction**

Brophy College Preparatory is an affluent, all-boys Jesuit high school in north-central Phoenix. Its student body has been made up predominantly of Caucasian students who lived within a ten-mile radius of the school. They came from feeder schools like All Saints Episcopal Day School and St. Francis Xavier Catholic Elementary School. Generally, they came from families who were able to pay the full tuition of the school.

When admitting students, one of the core beliefs of the school has been that no student who was able to handle the rigorous academic curriculum would be excluded based upon an inability to pay the tuition. Over 60% of students have received some sort of financial aid, and each year, Brophy became more and more ethnically diverse.

Hispanic students have been part of this increase in ethnic diversity. Most, but not all, Hispanic students have come from south or west Phoenix and were provided with some sort of scholarship or financial aid. These students tended to come from low SES neighborhoods, and they tended to represent the best and brightest students from public schools that had not traditionally sent large numbers of students to Brophy. As a result of their attendance, the school has been enriched by these students, by this diversity; however, often times these students have struggled when they first came to Brophy. After their ninth-grade year, some of these students also tended to leave the school disproportionately relative to their Caucasian counterparts.

The purpose of this action research project was to implement ways to better support ninth-grade Hispanic students at Brophy. The focus was on creating a community of support intervention for these students to ensure that larger numbers of Hispanic students from low SES backgrounds attain success during their ninth-grade years, remain at Brophy, and ultimately graduate from the school.

In this chapter, I have reviewed theoretical frameworks and related research that was relevant to understanding the problem of practice or its resolution through a proposed intervention. I have also provided a section on the connection between the research and the problem of practice and a final section on some findings from an initial round of research.

### **Cultural Capital Theory**

In order to understand Cultural Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1977), it may be instructive to consider some examples and illustrations of cultural capital. For instance, let us consider examples of cultural capital that pertain to an upper-middle-class family. First, the family owned a large in-home library for its children to utilize. Second, the family has taken their children to art museums, Disneyland, and the local zoo many times. Third, this family has sent the children to summer camp each summer for the past five years. In short, this family possessed decided economic advantages over lower-economic class counterparts. Notice, however, that these advantages have extended well beyond economic ones. For example, for these children cultural capital included the social, psychological, and academic advantages these children had as a result of their experiences compared to their lower-economic class counterparts who may not have had

the same experiences on which to draw when they were in their school setting. In terms of the Cultural Capital Theory, this has put children who have not had these experiences at a disadvantage when compared with more affluent peers.

Cultural Capital Theory was developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977). He wrote about social stratification among families in France and the related outcomes of children when taking into account their socioeconomic status and the attendant social advantages. Thus, for upper- and middle-class children, cultural capital was something they possessed by the mere fact they came from those socio-economic classes and lived in those privileged environments. These children experienced cultural advantages when compared to children living in lower class homes. Importantly, cultural capital has been shown to be associated with academic success (Jaeger, 2011; Lareau, 2003). The disadvantages can be seen most overtly when cultural capital has been considered with respect to children coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Parents from the lower class may have been aware of cultural capital, but without financial means, they were not able to provide this sort of capital for their children.

Sullivan (2001) described Bourdieu's theory in the following way, "Bourdieu states that cultural capital consists of familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, and especially the ability to understand and use 'educated' language" (p. 893). Much of what was associated with cultural capital was subtle and unstated within middle- and upper-class family environments. This, simply, was the way they went about their lives. By comparison, children from lower class families either had much less access or did not have access to this "educated" language on a regular basis, and, thus, were disadvantaged

when they participated with others from the dominant culture in schools or in workplace settings.

Sullivan summarized Bourdieu's theory, focusing especially on education when she outlined three principles of the theory: “(1) Parental cultural capital is inherited by children. (2) Children's cultural capital is converted into educational credentials. (3) Educational credentials are a major mechanism of social reproduction in advanced capitalist societies” (p. 895).

There is an implication here in cultural capital theory of a cycle that is both difficult to break into with regard to the lower class and difficult to not fall into if a child is reared in a middle- to upper-class family. Reay (2004) writes this regarding attributes that are attained or not attained based upon one's access to cultural capital, “For Bourdieu cultural capital encompasses a broad array of linguistic competencies, manners, preferences, and orientations, which, Bourdieu terms ‘subtle modalities in the relationship to culture and language’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 82)” (p. 74). The word subtle is important here as is the listing of small details like manners. The attainment of all of their modalities over time contributes to who a child becomes when he or she enters school. Academic success is often predicated on these subtle cultural attributes according to this theory, and it is either not easy or impossible to attain cultural capital without growing up in middle- or upper-class environments.

### **Related Studies**

Mullis, Rathge, and Mullis (2003) studied cultural capital using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study collected in 1988. Data from 24,599 Caucasian,

African-American, and Hispanic middle-school students from over one hundred public and private schools in the United States were examined. From this group, “88 were analyzed using indicators of social capital and resource capital” (p. 541). The researchers examined the relation between social capital, resource capital, academic performance, and adolescents’ behavior. Surveys were given to each of the 88 students, their parents or guardians, and two associated teachers. The authors used a linear structural equation measurement model for latent variables to analyze the data. In terms of the survey data, the authors studied 32 different variables. Although Mullis et al. were not able to find the clear relation between access to cultural capital and academic performance, they posited, “One implication ... is that families with limited resources may be at a disadvantage in creating strong social networks” (p. 546). This disadvantage studied over a longer amount of time could have negative implications for societal success when analyzing academic and social success of students. The authors concluded their study with a call for parents to focus on participation at school functions like sporting events and the PTA as a means of supporting their children. Actions like this seemed to have the clearest positive effect in terms of academic success.

Wells (2008) examined Cultural Capital Theory in the context of college retention. He used the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) as the data set for his research. His study employed a descriptive analysis as a means to interpret the NELS data. Wells was concerned with college retention rates for his study in the context of social and cultural capital. He also incorporated racial/ethnic groups in this context as well. Ultimately, he examined college retention rates of 1,310 students using social and

cultural capital indices. In his research, he utilized five models that included different sets of variables: (a) race and gender, (b) economic factors, i.e. tuition costs, (c) reading and mathematics test scores, (d) higher education characteristics, i.e. size of the institution, and (e) social and cultural capital effects.

The overall outcomes made generalizations difficult. For instance, Wells found a relatively high correlation between students who had at least one parent who had graduated from college and retention rates. That, however, was one of his highest correlational findings. This was an example of the effects of social capital, but it was not something that was previously unrecognized by educational theorists and researchers. Wells discussed the negative effects of a dearth of social capital with regard to students, but he went on to discuss societal balancing measures like financial aid as something that both helped students and affected the data.

Wells' data suggested that supportive peer and family networks positively affected college retention rates. The author also concluded that among racial and ethnic groups, Hispanics possessed the least amount of social and cultural capital. Finally, Wells (2008) concluded,

This study shows that social class, particularly as represented by amounts of traditionally-valued social and cultural capital, is positively associated with persistence in higher education. In other words, higher education is stratified by social class and may also serve as a vehicle of its reproduction. (p. 124)

Thus, based on the evidence gathered, there was support for the influence of Cultural Capital Theory on academic attainment.



## **Implications for the Study Based on Cultural Capital Theory**

The influence of Cultural Capital Theory is pervasive throughout the Brophy campus. Brophy is not a homogeneous environment made up of students from a one economic group. As a result, there are disparities on campus with regard to members of its student body with respect to cultural and social capital. The influence of the theory is subtle, but it is certainly felt. A student who lives in an apartment without a working oven can sit in class next to a classmate who drives a new sports car. It is important to note that these two students are of equal intelligence, but their access to cultural capital is decidedly different. Many Hispanic ninth-graders from low SES backgrounds may possess more limited levels of cultural capital, which may place them at a disadvantage relative to their peers. Leveling the cultural capital “playing field” is not possible because no one can magically provide economic benefits to students’ families to equalize cultural capital. Nevertheless, a program of support for students may be an appropriate way to sustain students during their first year. These students will have time to acquire cultural and social capital as they make their way through Brophy, into universities, and on to medical or law schools. Therefore, it is important to ensure their success irrespective of their cultural and social capital upon entering the school.

## **Sense of Community Theory**

McMillan and Chavis (1986) described sense of community (SOC) theory and how its understanding developed at their college. Its growth was tied into the ideas of the theory itself as noted when the authors wrote, “For several years many of us at Peabody College have participated in the evolution of a theory of community” (p. 6). This small fact seemed both unimportant in the overall context of their research and theory, but it

also seemed to befit and represent the theory at its apotheosis. The SOC theory was developed not by a lone researcher but by a community itself.

Sense of Community Theory has demonstrated an intuitive appeal and was easy to understand. McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined the theory in terms of four elements: (a) membership, (b) influence, (c) integration and fulfillment of needs, and (d) emotional connection. The authors maintained, “Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). SOC theory underscores the fact that learners may need support and a feeling of belonging to find academic success.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) described in detail the four elements of the theory, and then they discussed what they call the “dynamics” among the elements. The dynamics represented types of groups that have had an effect on individuals; they were archetypes of groups with which individuals may be confronted and could join throughout their lives. In this article, McMillan and Chavis suggested four groups including the university, the neighborhood, the youth gang, and the kibbutz. These dynamics are interesting and seemingly disparate and they seem to conflict with each other. The youth gang seems to be something that would prohibit a neighborhood member from making it to college. The youth gang, seemingly, would oppose the neighborhood, and the authors do address this. The kibbutz seems a tight-knit group, something to be valued. It is somewhat of a challenge to see how all of these groups are interrelated. That may be the authors’ point: it is not that these groups are linear with the

university group being the goal. All four of these groups can have positive and negative effects upon a learner as he attempts to grow as a student. The youth gang, for instance, can consist of alienated members of a neighborhood, but it can serve a purpose not unlike a college fraternity and have positive effects on its members.

The idea of community and its importance to learners and members of a society is vital. McMillan and Chavis (1986) concluded with a final statement about the importance of community, “It is our wish that this article will intensify the search for ways to strengthen the social fabric with the development of sense of community” (p. 20). The SOC Theory underpins other theories as it seems to serve as a basic need for learners—that of connecting with others. Sometimes this is forgotten, but community support and ideas of belonging are a desideratum vital to learning.

### **Related Studies**

Zalaquett (2005) employed qualitative procedures as he examined successful Hispanic students and the obstacles they faced and had overcome in school. The author’s study focused on understanding three primary barriers that he believed held Hispanic students back in higher education; while at the same time exploring eight factors that best supported Hispanic students in their pursuit of an education.

Zalaquett identified three barriers in his study, which were, “lack of strong adult supervision, misinformation about college requirements, and choice of less successful options” (p. 36). Then he turned his focus to eight factors that supported Hispanic students: family, education, responsibility to others, a sense of accomplishment, friendship, scholarships, community support, and school personnel. In his qualitative

study, Zalaquett interviewed twelve Hispanic students. The students were in college when the interviews took place and could be considered successful given their college status and overall GPA.

Zalaquett (2005) presented the group with questions like “tell us about your life story” and “what obstacles or challenges (if any) you had to overcome in order to attend the university” (p. 40). Although Zalaquett’s research was not action research, he conducted reconnaissance about barriers and how students overcame those barriers. By comparison, I developed and implemented an intervention to apply what I have learned based on previous work with students at Brophy.

One of the limitations of Zalaquett’s (2005) study was that it did not focus on unsuccessful Hispanic students. I would say that identifying the eight core ideals that helped Hispanic students succeed in school may be helpful to future high school students. By using the eight core ideals of support as a metric, a comparison of the eight could be made for a student who was identified as struggling in the high school setting to then identify areas where support might be provided.

Taking another approach, Rovai (2002) has developed an instrument to measure a sense of community in the classroom. Rovai’s primary focus as a researcher was on distance learning. He developed a 20-item scale for measuring a sense of community. In his work on sense of community, Rovai examined features that influenced students’ community experiences. Rovai explored sense of community in 375 students enrolled in 28 online courses. Of these students, 34% were males and 66% were females. Rovai

found that females had a greater sense of community. The author also found no evidence of differences due to ethnicity.

In terms of fostering community, students believed communication and having a feeling of classroom voice seemed most important. Rovai (2002) claimed, “Qualitative and quantitative methods used in these studies suggested the differences in community were related to communication pattern differences” (p. 207).

### **Implications for the Study Based on Sense of Community Theory**

The SOC theory plays a foundational role in this research. The SOC theory has a clear role in my efforts to create a community of support for Hispanic freshmen from low SES backgrounds at Brophy. This intuitive, practical theory can be meaningfully applied to incoming Brophy freshmen. All members of the freshman class enter Brophy each year being uncertain and apprehensive about their future at the school. More specifically, I can apply the theory to the students in this research as a means of increasing the rates at which they all feel welcome and comfortable on campus.

### **Duckworth’s Theory of Grit**

Angela Duckworth et al. (2007) have defined “grit” as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest ... despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress” (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007, p.1089-1090). The authors also claimed those who displayed grit stayed the course and did not give up easily or change direction when they encountered adversity or barriers that stood in the way of something they sought or their goals. In this initial study, Duckworth and her colleagues found two factors emerged

from their data: (a) consistency of interests and (b) perseverance of efforts; with each factor being represented by six items. These and other results from a series of studies suggested attainment of difficult goals required sustained, focused effort – in a word, grit.

In a second study, Duckworth and Quinn (2009) developed and shortened the original Grit Scale, reducing it to eight items. In a series of six studies, they developed and validated the shortened form called the Grit—S. The Grit—S still retained its two factor structure. Moreover, the eight-item instrument had strong internal consistency and several types of validity including predictive validity. Additionally, “among adolescents, the Grit—S longitudinally predicted GPA and, inversely, hours watching television (p. 166). Given these strong psychological test properties the Grit—S was chosen to be used in the current project.

Duckworth (2016) summarized the characteristics of grit when she wrote this about the theory of Grit:

We all face limits – not just in talent, but in opportunity. But more often than we think, our limits are self-imposed. We try, fail, and conclude we’ve bumped our heads against the ceiling of possibility. To be gritty is to keep putting one foot in front of the other. To be gritty is to hold fast to an interesting and purposeful goal. To be gritty is to invest, day after week after year, in challenging practice. To be gritty is to fall down seven times, and rise eight. (p. 275)

## **Implications for the Study Based on Duckworth's Theory of Grit, especially in Relation the Ideas of Community and Mentorship**

One quality that successful Hispanic students from low SES backgrounds have seemed to share was grit. Duckworth has written about it in her book *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. According to Duckworth (2016),

In sum, no matter the domain, the highly successful had a kind of ferocious determination that played out in two ways. First, these exemplars were unusually resilient and hardworking. Second, they knew in a very, very deep way what it was they wanted. They not only had determination, they had *direction*. (p. 8)

This led me back to the idea of community and mentorship. I wondered whether grit was something that could be taught or shared by successful upperclassmen mentors at Brophy. Would they be able to successfully model and share their ideas on resilience, their grit, to their freshmen? At the very least, grit and perseverance were something to be discussed in detail as I attempted to set up a structure that best supported these freshmen in their new environment. I thought it best to set up incoming Hispanic freshmen from low SES backgrounds with a successful mentor who also came from a similar background. Timing was important. I did not want these incoming freshmen to feel defeated or lost early. If that was the case, the potential struggles they may encounter would be exacerbated. According to Lawson and Lawson (2013),

When students do not achieve early school success, they are thought to gradually withdraw from active participation in school activities. Over time, students' lack of participation in school weakens their identification with school, debilitates their

academic self-esteem and self-concept, erodes affiliations with prosocial peers, and eventually reduces their chances of completing high school. (p. 442)

I envisioned students coming into Brophy with a passion to succeed, but I wondered what happened if they did not find that early success that they needed. I suspected mentors could help in these instances as they share their experiences of their early struggles and gave their freshmen strategies to overcome challenges they may have faced. I anticipated practical strategies plus the concept of grit would help them feel supported.

Support from the entire community was vital. This included me, the mentors, and all teachers and members of the administration. According to Wang and Holcombe (2010),

Students who feel supported socially by teachers tend to exhibit a greater likelihood of complying with teachers' expectations, which reduces the likelihood that these students will engage in distracting and deviant behaviors. Similarly, in a socially supportive and caring school environment, students have more positive attitudes towards academics, and they identify themselves as feeling that they belong in a school because they can freely express themselves and count on teachers for support with a range of problems. (p. 6)

I realized these efforts must all have been present from the first day of school for these students. Timing, again, was very important, and so the mentorship relationships were developed immediately upon the onset of the school year in August. Duckworth (2016) went on to write this about culture:



Whether we realize it or not, the culture in which we live, and with which we identify, powerfully shapes just about every aspect of our being. By culture, I don't mean the geographic or political boundaries that divide one people from another as much as the invisible psychological boundaries separating *us* from *them*. At its core, a culture is defined by the shared norms and values of a group of people. (p. 244)

Thus, it was imperative to set up a culture that best supported Hispanic students from low SES backgrounds as they entered Brophy. If this culture was simultaneously one that valued grit along with the idea that these freshmen would be supported no matter what, then the school culture would be something that fully acknowledged the potential and importance of these future leaders as vital to its own community and to the communities that these students would go on to influence after they graduated from Brophy.

Grit is something that must be discussed with the students. Fostering grit was critical as I worked with these students. I intended to provide them with a community of support; a community that valued what they brought to the overall school culture. I provided them my support and with support of mentors who have experienced what they may have currently been experiencing, who have shown grit and perseverance, and who have found success. When these efforts came together, I anticipated that if grit was not a characteristic that was already part of their repertoire, it would become soon after, and if that was the case, I believed they would be more likely to find success at Brophy.

## **Previous Action Research Informing the Project**

Faculty members and administrators at Brophy have cared deeply about its Hispanic students. Currently, there have been and continue to be programs of support at the school for Hispanic students and other students who have been faced with a variety of challenges. Still, I believed more could be done to support Hispanic students at Brophy. It was a school ripe for innovation when it came to supporting these students, and this, of course, was what guided this action research project.

In previous work, I interviewed a group of successful Hispanic sophomores and asked them about challenges they faced as freshman and how they overcame these matters. All of these students had faced the adversity of their difficult transition year and successfully completed it. I chose to interview them because they had insights into how they overcame the challenges they faced.

I asked them what Brophy can do to better support them during their ninth-grade year. I would like to note that they tended to acknowledge that they did feel supported by their teachers and administrators, but they offered me some practical ideas for innovation. Among the things that they mentioned were long bus rides and the possibility of Brophy-sponsored transport. They also mentioned the celebration of more Hispanic holidays on campus, and help with internet access. Nevertheless, the one underlying theme to which they returned was support. They felt support was most critical during their freshman year. They felt it, and they found success amidst a myriad of factors that were arrayed against them. Thus, a program of support should be developed for Hispanic freshmen who come to Brophy from low SES households. It was designed to encompass many of

the smaller ideas presented by the sophomores, but the common theme that ran through their responses was to develop a community of support designed for these students.

Feeling a sense of community was important according to all the students. It was seen as even more important by students when they began a new school. Moreover, it was of still greater consequence to students who began at a new school while facing obstacles related to their socioeconomic status. As a group, our Hispanic ninth-graders from low SES backgrounds have been confronted by a variety of challenges each year when they entered Brophy. Fostering a community where they felt supported was vital to their academic and emotional success when they took on this new challenge. Developing a strong community had great potential to help students overcome things like feeling they had limited social and cultural capital when they entered this school where many of their peers had greater amounts of the cultural capital. This capital could be accumulated as the students advanced their study at Brophy. Nevertheless, it could be accumulated if these students left Brophy after one year.

When some of the students' situations were reflected upon again, Brophy as an institution did not have the power to fix or alleviate many of the problems that students faced. Brophy could not find childcare for the student's younger siblings. Brophy could not find a better job for the mother who spent countless hours engaging in house-cleaning to support her family. What Brophy could do was more fully support students who faced these challenges. Brophy could form a community of support to enable these students the best chance to successfully complete four years at the private school. The development of a community of support for Hispanic students from low SES

backgrounds at Brophy provided these students a way to find success during their ninth-grade years and beyond to graduation.

In another cycle of action research, I interviewed three students: one sophomore, one junior, and one senior. I felt that interviewing sophomores through seniors would be valuable because their ability to discuss their experience increased as their school careers continued. Still, to have focused solely on seniors (ostensibly because they could have been the most articulate) would have been folly because it would have limited what could be gleaned from studying all grades levels on the whole. The evolution of what they said and how they felt over their four-year career had value in my overall research.

The sophomore, junior, and senior that I interviewed were students I still saw on campus on a weekly basis. These former students of mine were chosen for that convenience – I did not have to seek them out, I merely ran into them in the halls when I asked them to participate. Since I have taught these young men, I knew they were all articulate and anticipated they had good stories to tell about making it through Brophy. These students had struggled a bit during their freshman years, most freshmen do, but they made it through those initial struggles and have attained some sort of success at Brophy. Their interviews were interesting and illuminating, and I enjoyed their willingness to help.

I asked them to compose a “Where I Am From” poem about their experiences as Hispanic students from low-SES households at Brophy. This idea was taken from the poem “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon. I shared with them the template of the

original poem and asked them to then create their own. This was a powerful way for them to express how they felt about their time at this college prep school.

An example of one of the poems that a participant created was this:

#### Where I'm From

I am from both the poor and the rich I see kid's driving BMW's!

I also see adults taking the bus.

I am from the fields. Where we wake up to work at dawn, and get home to our families in the evening.

I am from a place where people either try or don't

Where people either give up and fail miserably, or become successful and live a happy life.

I am from a school filled with wealth. Also filled with happiness! But it also brings depression.

I am from a world in which I enjoy! Living the Brophy Bronco life, and living life to the max.

.....

Additionally, I conducted interviews. I kept my interview questions open-ended as opposed to being too specific. I did not want to predict what my students would be talking about in the interviews, but rather, I wanted them to take the open-ended questions in any direction that they saw fit.

The interviews took place in my classroom before school and at lunch. The three interviews lasted about 30 minutes each. As stated, I selected a sophomore, junior, and

senior for these interviews, choosing them because I knew them fairly well, knew what types of challenges they have faced in their lives, and knew that they had interesting stories to tell. For instance, one of these students never knew his father, and his mother worked as a food preparer for Wendy's. This is a student who faced long light rail rides and was thus often times unable to attend Brophy functions outside of the scope of the school day.

I coded the three interviews and found a number of stressors in the lives of these students. That having been said, I found a myriad of instances where my students found ways to stay positive in the midst of these stressors. As a means of illuminating what I gleaned from the interviews, I created a found poem using the words of my students verbatim with my codes in mind.

Here is an example from one of my students:

Knocked-down, yet Undefeated

(a poem in three parts based on the words of a student-interview participant at Brophy)

1.

“On First Steps”

I never thought of coming to Brophy

The chances, at the time, of a kid like me getting accepted was like the chances of  
a fish living on land

That is however, until somehow Mr. Ward showed up to my school to give one of his  
presentations to convince us of Brophy

As I stood up, the same three teachers told me I should talk to him about applying, saying  
that "This is the school for you!"

As I was almost there, my teachers barricaded the door I'd say, and said they wouldn't  
move until I allowed them to accompany me to talk to Mr. Ward about applying

I couldn't believe it when I actually was accepted

2.

"On the Reality"

My home life can be stressful sometimes

We are barely home

I felt like I was unprepared for the classes ahead

I just couldn't adjust to a 1-2 hour work and study load coming from 10-15 minute  
worksheets

I felt unprepared mentally and physically for the sometimes long nights of  
studying and homework

It just made me feel that they were in a way better than me

3.

"On Letting Go"

This advantage they have over me, I have no control over

I wasn't born into money

We don't have money hidden away somewhere

The only way I can, just keep trying my best and pushing through Brophy to finish  
successfully

I can't afford to go so far and get asked to leave

I won't let that happen

I'd have nowhere else to go

.....

Creating poems from the words of my students helped me to better understand what they are going through. The acts of coding their responses and then organizing their thoughts into poems allowed me to reflect upon their responses and find commonalities within all of the data that they provided to me.

### **Implications for the Study Based on My Previous Action Research**

There are several implications for the study based on previous action research work. First, based on the interviews of previously successful students, it was clear they believed support was critical to the success of freshmen at Brophy. Thus, a program that enhances support should be developed for Hispanic freshmen from low SES backgrounds. Second, these same successful students indicated the need to assist new Hispanic students coming to Brophy from low SES homes in developing a sense of community at the school. It is seen as even more important by students when they begin a new school. Fostering a sense of community where new students feel they “fit” is vital to their academic and emotional success when they take on the challenge of entering a demanding high school. A strong community has great potential to help students overcome things like feeling they have limited social and cultural capital.



## Chapter 3

### METHOD

The purpose of my action research project was to examine the challenges that Hispanic students from low SES households faced when they entered Brophy College Preparatory. Once these challenges were identified, my innovation was designed to focus on ways to better support these students, especially over the course of their transitional ninth-grade year. Improving both their overall experiences during their first year and the retention rates of these Hispanic students after their first year was the goal of the project. In this chapter, I have presented information about the method used to conduct the project. In particular, I have provided information about the setting, participants, role of the researcher, innovation, instruments, procedure, data analysis procedures, and threats to validity.

#### **Setting**

To further clarify the setting, Brophy College Prep is a private, Catholic Jesuit high school in downtown Phoenix. Each year, I have seen Hispanic freshmen from low-SES backgrounds disproportionately struggle to assimilate into our prep school culture. Once students have returned to campus for their sophomore year, they tended to fare much better.

I have taught freshmen at the school. I served as a counselor, coach, and the director of our scholarship work study students, and so I have dealt first-hand with all of our Hispanic students who came from lower SES backgrounds. I am also a Brophy graduate. I was a scholarship, financial aid student as well, over 20 years ago. I was a

west-side resident who had an hour-long bus ride to school and struggled to fit in. I felt I have some understanding of what these students were going through, and I intended to support them in the best possible way as they took on the new challenges associated with attending Brophy.

## **Participants**

**Student participants.** Hispanic students who attended Brophy from west and south Phoenix typically had families who supported their decision to take on the endeavor of a new school, but their overall family environment was often times challenging. These students sometimes came from single-parent homes and therefore the mother may have worked long hours. Thus, the son, if he was the eldest of the children, may have had to care for younger siblings when the mother worked. Or, the student may have had to commute for over an hour because he lived far from school. These were just a few of the challenges these students dealt with that other, more affluent students at our school did not.

Overall, the students have demonstrated they were quite capable academically, but they found the academic challenge of the school to be quite demanding. Brophy students have followed a rigorous college-prep program, which was reflected in the large number of advanced placement and dual enrollment classes that have been offered. Moreover, with respect to the AP classes, students have achieved various levels of recognition in advanced placement such as scholars, honors, distinction, and national levels. In terms of college testing, for the class of 2015, scores for ACT composite were 26.9 on average and students achieved SAT scores of 606 for critical reading, 595 for

mathematics, and 581 for writing. There have also been large numbers of National Merit Scholars and National Hispanic Scholars. To supplement the academic programs, there have been a wide variety of clubs, athletic teams, and other extra-curricular opportunities for students.

The freshmen who participated in this program were 14 to 15 years old. They all came to Brophy from public grammar schools. The students have not established a set GPA at the onset of this program. Nevertheless, with technology and our grade book websites, they all were able to access their running non-official grades. Some of these students participated in sports. There were some who were playing football and some who were running cross country. Some hoped to play lacrosse, or wrestle, or make the baseball team. They have also joined some clubs on campus. The 16 Hispanic students from low SES backgrounds who participated in this program all have achieved some semblance of success this year already, but they have all struggled, and they seemed to earnestly hope to become successful at their new school.

**Student mentors.** Four Hispanic student mentors from low SES backgrounds worked with the freshmen students. These were all senior students who I taught in my freshman English class four years ago. They all participated in the financial work study program and have done so for four years. They were between 17 and 18 years old. Some of them have joined honors and AP classes at Brophy after beginning in my non-honors English class. Some have GPA's above a 4.0, others were more near a straight B, 3.0 average. None played varsity-level sports. They all participated in some clubs at their school, most notably *Hermanos Unidos*, which has been a club that has focused on

charitable work, soccer, and the Hispanic-experience at Brophy. Most have part-time jobs, and all will go on to college in a few months after they have achieved their goals of graduating from Brophy. Some were nominated for prestigious college scholarships and for high level recognition that could facilitate them getting into very prestigious colleges.

These four have had their shares of struggles at Brophy, but all have found ways to overcome them. These four seniors have expressed to me that they were excited and happy that they were involved in this program.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this action research study, my role included designer and implementer of the innovation, observer, and collector of data. First, as designer, I developed the large-group sessions for the intervention. As the implementer, I met with participants and held eight sessions with them (see intervention and procedure below). I also conducted training sessions with the mentors to ensure they were prepared to hold the sessions with their four students. As an action researcher, I served as an observer of the large- and small-group sessions. I gathered all the data for the study including administering surveys, collecting student journals, conducting student interviews, and keeping my own journal throughout the study.

With respect to positionality, I was an insider working with insiders (Herr & Anderson, 2015). In this role, I worked collaboratively with participating students and student mentors to facilitate development of a community to support freshmen students.

## **Innovation**

The innovation was conducted in three-week cycles. During Week 1 of a cycle, I conducted a large-group session to introduce the topic, e.g., transition to high school, ways to succeed in the classroom, etc. In Week 2 of the cycle, four student mentors conducted small-group sessions of four students each on the topic. Then, during Week 3 of the cycle, I met with students in a large group to discuss the topic based on what they recorded in their journals as they worked on the topic for the past several weeks. This three-week cycle was repeated for the four topics identified above.

**Week 1.** I met with the sixteen students in a large group, cohort meeting at lunch. These days were established and all meetings were held on Tuesdays. So, on this first Tuesday, I briefly provided an overview of the project to the students and discussed what we would be doing over time. The focus of this session was their transition to high school and how their current experience differed from that of their previous grammar school. We discussed how these differences presented challenges and how to overcome them. For example, in the very first week, we discussed the topic of transitioning to high school. The freshmen were asked to write in a journal as a means of reflecting on their new found knowledge.

**Week 2.** The second week of a cycle was always conducted by the mentors. The upperclassmen met with smaller groups of four students and discussed their transition (or another appropriate topic) and what they were going through when they faced these same issues. They shared how they coped with their early struggles at the school and how they were ultimately able to find success. Again, the freshmen were asked to write in their

journals as a means of reflecting on their new found knowledge that they were accumulating from both me and their mentors.

**Week 3.** The Week 3 discussion was based on the sixteen participants' journal reflections. Given their reflections, I led another large group cohort meeting with the freshmen at lunch, and students were given a chance to share their reflections and their experiences. In this context, the freshmen learned from each other and realized they were all experiencing similar challenges that could be overcome with grit and a community to support them.

**Weeks 4-6.** Weeks 4-6 were similar to Weeks 1-3 except a new focus guided the work. This focus was information on ways to succeed in the classroom. This information was practical and specific. I offered the freshmen specific information about strategies for doing homework, tests, and how to prepare outside of the classroom to find success within the classroom. During Week 5, the mentors were invaluable as they described their use of strategies and procedures to deal with these matters. Week 6 constituted the final week of this cycle, and it, again, provided opportunities for the students to share information with one another about what they were doing currently in their classes and how they were able to best find success.

**Weeks 7-9.** The next three-week cycle focused on assisting students to become involved in Brophy culture and community. The rationale for this cycle was to build skills so students would be much more comfortable in our cohort community. I met with students during the initial week and we held a discussion on these matters and they wrote in their journals. The mentors shared ways they have been involved the Brophy

community during their time at the school. They spoke about clubs, sports, and other potential activities that were of interest to the students and how students could connect to these groups and students posted their thoughts in their journals. During the last week, I met with the group of 16 students, again. We held discussions of their thoughts and reflections on becoming involved in the community and culture at Brophy.

**Weeks 10-12.** The final three-week cycle focused on assisting students to learn how to work more effectively with teachers. The rationale for this cycle was to build skills so students were much more able to approach teachers and interact with teachers about their academic support needs. During Week 10, I held a large group meeting. Then, in Week 11, the mentors shared ways they have worked with teachers in this manner. Finally, in Week 12, we met as a large group to discuss students' experiences and what they had tried during this three-week segment.

### **Instruments**

The project was designed as a mixed methods project for which there were both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data came from two surveys. A pre- and a post-intervention survey was given to the sixteen freshmen prior to and following the intervention administered during the twelve-week program. The survey included assessment of their perceptions about making the transition to Brophy and about themselves as new students at the school. The qualitative data emanated from multiple sources — student journals, student interviews, transcripts of the researcher-led sessions from Weeks 1 and 3 of each of the four cycles, and a researcher journal.

**Quantitative surveys.** The survey instrument assessed sense of community. It was adapted from the work of Peterson, Speer, and McMillan (2008). The instrument consisted of eight items that assessed four constructs — needs fulfillment, membership, influence, and emotional connection. These items were originally developed to measure sense of community in neighborhoods. In the adaptation the word “school” was substituted for “neighborhood.” Two examples of adapted items are, “I can get what I need in this school,” and “I feel like a member of this school.” Students responded on a 4-point, Likert scale where 4 = *Strongly Agree*, 3 = *Agree*, 2 = *Disagree*, and 1 = *Strongly Disagree*. The complete set of items has been provided in Appendix A. See Appendix A.

The second survey instrument assessed “school community.” It was adapted from Alfred Rovai’s (2002) Classroom Community Scale. The instrument consisted of 10 items that assessed the construct of “connectedness.” These items were originally developed to measure how well students felt connected to one another in an online course. In the adaptation, the word “school” was substituted for “course.” Two examples of adapted items are, “I trust others in this school,” and “I feel that members of this school depend on me.” Students responded on a 4-point, Likert scale where 4 = *Strongly Agree*, 3 = *Agree*, 2 = *Disagree*, and 1 = *Strongly Disagree*. The complete set of items has been provided in Appendix B. See Appendix B.

The third survey instrument assessed Grit. It was the short version of the Grit instrument, the Grit—S, which was based on the work of Duckworth and Quinn (2009). The instrument consisted of eight items that assessed two constructs — perseverance of



efforts and consistency of interest. Two examples of items were, “I am a hard worker,” and “I finish whatever I begin.” Students made responses on a 5-point, Likert scale where 5 = *Very much like me*, 4 = *Mostly like me*, 3 = *Somewhat like me*, 2 = *Not much like me*, and 1 = *Not like me at all*. The complete set of items has been provided in Appendix C. See Appendix C.

The fourth survey instrument assessed the effectiveness of the intervention with respect to three constructs — (a) transition to high school, (b) classroom success skills, and (c) working effectively with teachers. This instrument was a researcher-constructed instrument. The instrument consisted of nine items, three that assessed each construct. Three examples of items, one for each construct, were, “I know how to find resources here at Brophy to help me make the transition to high school,” “I ask myself questions to make sure I know the material I have been studying,” and “I feel comfortable talking to my teachers about homework assignments.” Students responded on a 4-point, Likert scale where 4 = *Strongly Agree*, 3 = *Agree*, 2 = *Disagree*, and 1 = *Strongly Disagree*. The complete set of items is provided in Appendix D. See Appendix D.

**Qualitative data.** Three types of qualitative data were gathered. First, I wrote some field notes on the large-group sessions that were held during Weeks 1 and 3 of each session. Second, I maintained a researcher journal throughout the period of the research study. Third, I conducted interviews with the students at the conclusion of the study. With respect to the interviews, there were 10 interview questions in all, and they covered five areas: (a) connectedness to Brophy, (b) Grit, (c) transitioning to Brophy, (d) study strategies, and (e) interacting with teachers. Some examples of interview questions were,

“Describe how connected you feel to Brophy,” and “Has participating in the program changed your feeling of being connected? If so, how?” Also, “How are you adjusting to the academic/class demands at Brophy? What has helped in making that transition? How did it help?” The complete set of interview questions has been provided in Appendix E. See Appendix E.

## Procedure

With my sixteen-student cohort group, I developed a 12-week cycle of innovation. Prior to this, I gave them the four, Likert-scale instruments that asked them about how connected they felt to the Brophy community, Grit, and researcher-created items on their transition, study strategies, and interacting with teachers. When the intervention cycles concluded, I administered the four, Likert-scale instruments again to the sixteen freshmen students, and I conducted the interviews. Table 1 provided a timeline and procedures for the study including the various procedural steps such as approvals, implementation of the innovation, data collection, data analyses, etc. See Table 1.

Table 1

### *Timeline and Procedures for the Project*

Time frame	Actions	Procedures
Aug. 15, 2016	Secured parental permission and student assent to participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote and distributed permission letters</li> <li>• After securing parental permission, secured student assent</li> </ul>
Aug. 29, 2016	Administered pre-intervention surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created surveys for distribution</li> <li>• Administered and collected</li> </ul>

		survey data
Sept. 05, 2016	Conducted first intervention cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held large-group session in Week 1</li> <li>• Trained mentors for Week 2</li> <li>• Monitored Week 2 sessions</li> <li>• Held large-group session in Week 3</li> <li>• Collected field notes</li> </ul>
Sept. 26, 2016	Conducted second intervention cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held large-group session in Week 1</li> <li>• Trained mentors for Week 2</li> <li>• Monitored Week 2 sessions</li> <li>• Held large-group session in Week 3</li> <li>• Collected field notes</li> </ul>
Oct. 17, 2016	Conducted third intervention cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held large-group session in Week 1</li> <li>• Trained mentors for Week 2</li> <li>• Monitored Week 2 sessions</li> <li>• Held large-group session in Week 3</li> <li>• Collected field notes</li> </ul>
Nov. 07, 2016	Conducted fourth intervention cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held large-group session in Week 1</li> <li>• Trained mentors for Week 2</li> <li>• Monitored Week 2 sessions</li> <li>• Held large-group session in Week 3</li> <li>• Collected field notes</li> </ul>
Nov. 28, 2016	Administered post-intervention surveys and conducted interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created surveys for distribution</li> <li>• Administered and collected survey data</li> <li>• Conducted interviews</li> </ul>
Dec. 05, 2016	Conducted interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducted interviews</li> </ul>
Dec. 12, 2016	Analyzed data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Began data analysis</li> </ul>

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## **Data Analysis Procedures**

Quantitative data were analyzed in numerous ways. First, reliabilities of the various constructs were examined. Next, descriptive statistics were presented.

Qualitative data included students' journals and semi-structured interviews of student participants. As the researcher, I also kept a journal during the twelve-week study. These qualitative data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data were entered into HyperRESEARCH (HyperResearch 3.7.3, 2015) and subsequently analyzed. Using the constant comparative process, I first engaged in open coding to initially identify concepts. Then, data were gathered into theme-related components, which were collected into emerging themes. Themes were used to develop assertions. Quotes from the original qualitative data were used to support the assertions and themes.

## **Threats to Validity**

There were several potential threats to validity. History was one type of threat to validity. Particularly, history reflected the fact that events occurring during the same time period as the intervention may have affected the outcome rather than the intervention (Smith & Glass, 1987). For example, if participating students also received additional information or content related to the intervention, their behavior may change because of that information; not the intervention, per se. Maturation may also have been a threat to validity. The maturation threat would have occurred when events internal to the research participants, rather than the intervention, were responsible for changes in the dependent variable (Smith & Glass, 1987). This threat had the possibility of being

particularly strong in the current study. Specifically, participants in the project were developing their abilities to cope with being a student at Brophy as a natural part of their development as a student, while at the same time they were participating in the intervention. Thus, although I would like to have claimed the intervention caused their growth in coping with the demands of school, “fitting in” at the school, etc.; the fact that a natural maturing process may also have been playing a substantial role in any growth that was observed in the participants.

## Chapter 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The results are presented in two sections. The first section provides information about the quantitative data, which was gleaned from a pre- and a post-intervention survey instruments that assessed ten constructs. The ninth graders took a pre-intervention assessment when they were a few weeks into starting their Brophy careers, and a post-intervention assessment after the twelve-week intervention in which they participated. Prior to analyzing the means, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were computed for each of the constructs. Pre- and post- intervention reliabilities have been presented in Table 2. These data were based on 4-point scales except for Grit scores which were based on 5-point scales.

Table 2

*Cronbach Reliabilities of Pre- and Post-Intervention Scores*

Construct	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Sense of Community—Needs Fulfillment	-.29	1.00
Sense of Community—Membership	.75	.25
Sense of Community—Influence	.42	.64
Sense of Community—Emotional Connection	.50	---*
Classroom Community Scale	.80	.35**
Transition to High School	.47	---*
Classroom Success Scale	.64	.81
Working Effectively with Teachers	.87	.87
Grit—Consistency of Interests	.67	.66
Grit—Perseverance of Efforts	.72	.78

\*No variation in scores so reliability was not computed.

\*\*Three of these items showed no variability and were deleted from the analysis.

Overall, the reliabilities suggested the quantitative data was not replicable and each variable must be carefully considered individually. The data appeared to not be very trustworthy. Further, many of the reliabilities did not exceed .70, which is typically considered to be a minimal, acceptable level of reliability. Nevertheless, the last four constructs had reasonable kinds of reliability and therefore were more interpretable.

The means and standard deviations for the ten constructs across the two times of measurement were presented in Table 3. Any interpretations of the data must be made very cautiously because the reliabilities were so variable. The last four constructs were more interpretable.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for All 10 Constructs*

Construct	Pre-test	Post-test
Sense of Community—Needs Fulfillment	3.84 (0.24)*	3.94 (0.25)
Sense of Community—Membership	3.63 (0.50)	3.72 (0.36)
Sense of Community—Influence	3.13 (0.56)	3.31 (0.51)
Sense of Community—Emotional Connection	3.47 (0.46)	4.00 (0.00)
Classroom Community Scale	3.27 (0.40)	3.79 (0.17)
Transition to High School	3.42 (0.43)	3.98 (0.08)
Classroom Success Scale	3.01 (0.48)	3.75 (0.33)
Working Effectively with Teachers	3.46 (0.68)	3.85 (0.32)
Grit—Consistency of Interests	3.00 (0.72)	3.50 (0.66)
Grit—Perseverance of Efforts	4.13 (0.59)	4.72 (0.47)

\*--Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses.

The focus of the descriptive presentation of the data was on the last four constructs because the reliabilities of those measures were at or approaching an acceptable level, i.e., about .70 or above. Examining the increase of scores for the last



four constructs showed the greatest increase of 0.74 points was attained on the classroom success scale, and the increase was 0.39 points for the working effectively with teachers scale. The two constructs related to Grit showed strong gains, as well. The students' consistency of interests increased by 0.50 points, and their perseverance of effort mean increased by 0.59 from the pre- to the post-intervention assessment.

### Results from Qualitative Data

In this section, results from the qualitative data were presented. Results were compiled from interviews done with a sample of eight freshmen who participated in the twelve-week innovation and their four student-mentor senior leaders. My field notes and journal entries were also consulted and utilized for this section. Table 4 below displayed the themes and the associated theme-related components and assertions that emerged from the interview data.

Table 4

*Themes\*, Theme-related Components, and Assertions for Interview Data*

Themes and Theme-related Components	Assertions
<i>Community</i>	1. Students developed a sense of community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connectedness — Students demonstrated a connection to Brophy Prep.</li> <li>Comfort — Students exhibited a sense of comfort at Brophy Prep.</li> </ul>	that was demonstrated in their sense of connectedness and comfort.

### *Grit*

- Responding to failure — Students found ways to respond to failure in positive ways.
- Achieving goals — Students articulated goals and described that they achieved their goals.

### 2. Students learned to respond in positive

ways to failure, leading them to achieve their goals.

### *School Navigation*

- Academic transition — Students were able to successfully transition to Brophy Prep from their previous schools.
- Academic strategies — Students developed academic strategies to help them navigate the school.
- Social transition — Students made friends with their peers and upperclassmen mentors.

### 3. Students developed school navigation

skills that included academic and social transitions and academic strategies for their classes.

\*--Note: Themes are in italic font.

**Community.** *Assertion 1 - Students developed a sense of community that was demonstrated in their sense of connectedness and comfort.* In the interviews, the theme of community was prevalent in most of their responses. More specifically, the ideas of

feeling connected to Brophy Prep because of the program and feeling more comfortable on campus due to the innovation were present in their responses to the interview questions. The following theme-related components made up the theme that led to Assertion 1: (a) students demonstrated a connection to Brophy; and (b) students exhibited a sense of comfort at Brophy.

***Connectedness.*** The innovation facilitated a connection to Brophy for many of the students who participated. Jesus, a ninth-grade participant, related,

I feel like I am a part of this school. I want to be actively involved in the community. I don't know if I would be as comfortable with Brophy if I had not attended the program. The program helped me become more comfortable with the school and how it works. It really helped that I could text John [student mentor]. On the first day, it felt like I was, in a sense, coming home.

His peer Andy concurred and when he said,

I feel connected to Brophy since it can take over most of your time if you don't know how to manage it well. Yes, the program definitely has helped me transition. It helped me with a base group of friends I could rely on. Everyone there is nice and making new friends was not hard at all.

Another student-participant, Anthony, stated,

I think the program truly has changed my perception of Brophy. When I first got to Brophy I just thought, 'Ugh! Whole bunch of white rich kids.' Then after I started going at lunch, my classmates became friends that I trust and will trust for

the next four years. Now, I feel more than connected to Brophy. I am part of Brophy and like a puzzle I am a piece that is essential to the Brophy puzzle.

Daniel, a senior at Brophy who served as a student-mentor in the program, said this of his participation in the innovation, “I wish I had something like this when I was a freshman. I was able to make it through, but this would have helped build that connection, that I eventually got, faster.”

***Comfort (emotional connection).*** The program also helped most of the freshmen feel more comfortable and emotionally connected to the Brophy campus. Gilberto, a ninth-grader, stated,

I would say I feel comfortable at Brophy just because the staff and students there are so welcoming and helpful. Absolutely, at first I was shy and uncomfortable, but then that all changed when I got to the program. The texting was cool, and I’m still texting him [his student mentor, Daniel] after the program.

Miguel, another freshman, added,

At Brophy, I am confident and sure of myself since I know where to get help and where to find anything I need. The program helped me feel more comfortable by exposing me to new friends. John [his student mentor] personally helped me find my way around the school and always answered my texts when I had a question.

Additionally, Juan, a ninth-grader at Brophy, confirmed this reaction when he responded,

I am quite comfortable at Brophy. Everyone is kind and helpful. The program has helped me make lifelong friends and companions. It also helped me adjust to the

life of Brophy. It was kind of weird in the beginning of the program, but the environment of Brophy changes you. I felt like I wouldn't make it sometimes with all the stress and trouble in my life. It made it easier that I could reach out to my student leader by text when I had a question or needed help. I hope I can help a freshman like that one day.

I asked Juan to comment on the "stress and trouble" in his life that he referenced. He told me that they could not afford to continue to pay for Internet access and that he had to go to his mother's work for Wi-Fi in order to complete his Internet-based homework assignments like the grammar and vocabulary homework that I assign and his math homework.

"It's okay now," said Juan. He went on to say,

I know I could get most of the homework done at lunch, but the new gym is fun, and I like playing basketball. I have to take the light rail home right after school because I have to watch my sisters. I get food and do homework at night at my mom's work.

Juan also mentioned a story about his student mentor: "Roberto [his student mentor] told me a story about getting kicked out of his apartment when he was a freshman. I don't know why, but it made me feel better."

Juan's student leader Roberto related, "All of the four freshmen in my small group still text me. I like it when they do. I enjoy helping them, and I always text them right back."

More than a few times, I took note of their texting references. It came up a lot during the intervention cycle. This was something that I did not really consider prior to the intervention, but I saw it as being vital now. I was not on a texting relationship with any of the students or student mentors, but they took to it immediately. It was one of the first gestures of the student mentors. They did this almost instantaneously upon meeting their group of four freshmen, and they did so without my prompting.

Miguel referenced this with regard to feeling emotionally connected through the texting: “I do feel connected since without this program I only would have known one person and most likely would be very shy. I still text John [student mentor] a lot during the week.”

Miguel’s student mentor John confirmed this, “Miguel texts me all the time, and that’s fine. He is one of the freshmen who doesn’t have a best friend yet.”

**Grit.** *Assertion 2 - Students learned to respond in positive ways to failure, leading them to achieve their goals.* Knowing what grit is and knowing it is an important part of finding success at Brophy became a focus during the 12-week intervention. The students learned how to respond to setbacks and failure at their new school. Knowing how to continue on in the midst of failure, helped students in the program achieve goals on campus. The following theme-related components made up the theme that led to Assertion 2: (a) students learned to respond in positive ways to failure, and (b) they were to achieve their goals.

***Responding to failure (perseverance).*** Freshmen students at Brophy have frequently experienced failure. Some were able to overcome it, and these were the

students who typically returned for their sophomore years and who then went on to graduate. Those who did not learn to persevere following setbacks struggled at Brophy, and – in the past – these were the students who were asked to leave the school after their first year or chose to voluntarily leave. Jesus, a freshmen participant, said this about persevering after failure,

When I fail, it gives me a reason to try harder. I don't feel like anyone is going to put me down because I couldn't do something. Instead, someone will help me understand the concept better. John [student mentor] helped me with that.

Juan also responded in the following way when asked about failure,

I have failed a couple of times to turn in homework. I have kind of stressed myself out, but I always try to bounce back as quickly as I could. I emailed the teacher and hoped that I'd get an extension to my due date or get excused by the teacher to make up the work.

Roberto [student mentor] went through all of this and more when he was a freshman. Roberto related this to me regarding his struggles early on at Brophy, the way he persevered, and how he continues to persevere as he prepares to graduate in May when he suggested,

Ever since I was a freshman, my outside Brophy life requires that I work with my father and mother when I do not have much schoolwork, but I always have a lot of homework, and I still have to work. This takes time away from me to do other activities from simply chilling or to annoyingly bother my siblings. My mother and father are both from Mexico. They came from the poor, violence-ridden state

of Guerrero. They came to America to work for a better life for my siblings and I. Neither of them attended high school. They both work in insulation. I've gone with them over the last four years when they need me. The work sucks. On my first trips to help work, I wanted to scratch my skin off. The work is really itchy. This was when I first started at Brophy, and that made it really hard. Their boss Nestor tells my father and mother to take me out of school 'cause he says I'm wasting my time. I feel sorry for Nestor. I feel he's lost hope that some things can't change. There is no way I'll drop out of school. I've almost made it, and I won't give up. My little brother George will go to Brophy next year too.

I taught Roberto when he was a freshman. He was in my non-honors English class, and he's since risen to take AP English IV among his other very challenging classes. English is not his first language, and, for the most part, it is not spoken in his home. He is on target to attend an Ivy League school in the fall – hopefully, with some really good scholarships to help him with tuition. I did not know that he was working like this outside of school when I taught him four years ago. We did not talk about his grit and determination four years ago when he was in my class. I saw that in him back then, but did not know about his life to this extent. He would go through patches of not turning in homework, and I see why now. He is someone who has experienced failure and strife and has found ways to excel through it. His freshmen protégés like Juan were fortunate to have him as their senior student leader.

Mark, a ninth-grade participant, made reference to grit and persevering in the midst of struggles when he claimed,



When I first started, I was scared. I did not want to let anyone down or not live up to their expectations. I wanted to call it quits and transfer. Along the process, I had great people who supported me and advised for me to stay, so I did so because it was for the best.

A senior student mentor named Tim commented,

My GPA was terrible freshman year. Really bad. I told all my guys that, and I think it made them feel better. Somehow, I came back for my second year at Brophy and started earning pretty good grades. I'm glad I didn't quit.

I took some notes during these weeks, mainly reflections of the senior student leaders. Again, I taught these students four years ago. I learned things about them and what they were going through during their freshmen years that I did not know. I wish I would have known it at the time.

Roberto, a senior student mentor, related this about some of things that he's had to overcome, starting in his ninth-grade year at Brophy when he said,

My dad's highest level of education is the sixth grade and my mom's highest level of education is to the seventh grade. They could not help me with homework when I started at Brophy. I really didn't have anyone to help me, and we didn't have Internet access yet when I was a freshman. That was tough. I thought about quitting all the time and going to Carl Hayden. Also, I lost my best friend from my neighborhood my freshman year due to gun violence.

Roberto has now become really involved with our admissions in helping recruit more students from his neighborhood to Brophy. This was another student who I did not

talk to about perseverance and failure when I taught him four years ago. Still, he has been the epitome of grit and determination as a senior at our school. He has told me, “I really enjoy sharing my stories with my guys. That’s been my favorite part, I think.”

***Achieving goals.*** As the student leaders mentioned, not giving up after experiencing failure led to their success. They were able to achieve their goals, and they will all now graduate in May, most with honors and distinction. Max, a freshman in the program, replied when asked to comment on achieving a goal at the school when he offered the following comment,

One time I can remember achieving a goal here at Brophy is the time I got a 30 out of 30 on a Scripture quiz. In the first semester, Scripture was not my best class, and I was struggling, and now when this semester comes up, and we have our first quiz, I learned from my mistakes, and I studied a lot more than I did last semester, and then I got the 30 out of 30 on the quiz, which proved to me that I had no reason to not earn an A in this class.

Freshmen students were asked to discuss a time that they achieved a goal after first experiencing failure. Juan said,

Bio [Biology] is my hardest class. It was Roberto’s [his student mentor] hardest class his first year, too. I had a D going for a while. I had another huge biology test coming up, and I was furiously studying because this was one of the hardest tests that I was going to take in my first semester. When the day of the test came, I was extremely nervous, but I started taking the test, and I realized that I knew all of this. When I submitted my test, I ended up getting an A.

Gilberto also mentioned his challenging biology class in response to the question, One time I have achieved a goal at Brophy was when I brought myself from a C in biology up to a solid A. Daniel [student mentor] gave me some pointers on what to study before this test. He took the class a few years ago.

Daniel commented on helping Gilberto and his own experiences in biology his freshman year when he said,

That was one of my hardest classes ever. Chem [Chemistry] is hard too, probably harder, but bio [biology] is up there. I don't even know how I made it, but I think I just got better at figuring out what Ms. Johnson was going to ask. I studied more too, and I started studying with friends before tests. I talked to Gilberto about that, and he eventually really improved. I had Gilberto start studying with Andy [another freshman participant in Daniel's four member cohort group] before tests. They had the same teacher, and I helped too.

Gestures like this were something I notated over the course of the innovation. Daniel studying with some of his freshmen peers was something that was completely outside of the program. There were other examples of this as well as the cycle of research went on. I felt texting fell into this category as well because texting back and forth with their freshmen peers was not something I asked from them – it was something they took on without me. Multiple times in interviews with the seniors and in casual conversations throughout the innovation the seniors made reference to wishing they had something like this when they were freshmen, and I thought that motivated them to help out their protégés in any ways that they could. Sharing stories of their failures and how

they overcame various issues was helpful to the freshmen because it showed failure and struggle was something that was not only experienced by them. Their senior mentors experienced it, and they survived, and this showed the freshmen that they could survive it as well.

Daniel said this about the struggles of his freshman year as I asked him to tell me about what his first year at the school was like.

As a freshman, it almost felt like starting kindergarten all over again. My mom and dad divorced when I was a freshman. I have six siblings. Three are from my dad and another woman and the other three are from my mom and dad. After the divorce, my mom has raised me and my three other brothers primarily by herself. Since I'm the oldest, I've had to help a lot. An example is me coming home from school at four or five and that is when my mom has me start cleaning. My little brothers were whiny because they are hungry, and my mom would ask if my homework is done. It was hard to get it all done and keep everything going. Then at school, I'd hear some students who I know are very affluent complain. They would say 'Man, today I have to go to my tutor,' and I was confused. I was like why are you complaining about a tutor? I don't have the money to have a tutor, but you have to make it any way you can.

Duckworth (2016), in her book *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* related some very interesting stories about people who have overcome their struggles and grown from their failures. The stories of senior student mentors like Roberto, John, and Daniel could have just as easily been featured in the book as well. Their willingness to

share their stories with their freshmen served as a major benefit to the ninth-graders as they learned about the ideas of Grit and applied these ideas to their freshman experiences.

**School Navigation.** *Assertion 3 - Students developed school navigation skills that included academic and social transitions and academic strategies for their classes.*

The idea that it was important to learn how to better “navigate” the Brophy campus and curriculum was represented frequently in the post-intervention interviews. To successfully navigate one’s freshman year at Brophy, students needed to learn how to utilize certain websites to check emails from teachers, to access homework, and to stay on top of their grades. Each of a freshman’s seven classes has its own schedule and pattern to it. Some teachers organized their course content using an online Google doc. Some used a paper-copy syllabus or a printed calendar. There were no uniformities in how teachers organized their classes.

The students dealt with a transition to a challenging prep-school environment after attending public schools. The transition both academically and socially was a concern for freshmen students, especially those who may have learned about Brophy only a few weeks or months before applying. Thus, the skills associated with successfully navigating their new school were a focal point of the innovation. The program assisted freshmen with knowledge and advice on how best to balance homework with social life, communicate with teachers, asking them for help when needed, and how to make new friends. The following theme-related components made up the themes that led to Assertion 3: (a) students were able to successfully transition to Brophy from their

previous school; (b) students developed academic strategies to help them navigate the school; and (c) students made friends with their peers and upperclassmen mentors.

***Academic transition.*** One of the senior student leaders named John said this on his academic transition to Brophy four years ago when he was a freshman, “The transition process can make you feel like less than you really are. It’s not what Brophy did or didn’t do. I couldn’t figure things out early on when I started here.”

A freshman who participated in the intervention named Max commented, The program gave me the chance to get to know Brophy quickly when the semester began. I was really nervous about going to a new school that I knew almost nothing about. The transition was tough. The program connected me with Brophy by showing me what it has to offer. The hardest part was that I didn’t know how to turn all my homework in, but I got help with that. Tim [his student mentor] helped me a lot, but Mark and Anthony helped too. It’s like we all figured it out together.

His peer Jesus said,

Well, I feel comfortable enough to understand how to study and get my stuff done. Participating in the program let me know more people like John [his student mentor], which gave me a better support system, which was good because everything was so new and different.

The student leader John also said this,

I never owned any tablet or iPad before I went to Brophy. My technology skills were very minimal, so I struggled to understand and do very simple tasks. In

middle school, I was only taught to use paper and pencil. My final and most difficult struggle was the work load. I was not used to more than an hour and a half of homework at my middle school. At the beginning of Brophy, I was scared to join any sports or even a club because I was unsure if I could keep up with it all and have good grades. I guess I just figured it out, but my first year, especially first semester, was really hard. Being a group leader was fun because I was able to tell them [his freshmen protégés] things I learned to help them. I told them the basic stuff, but I also told them to join clubs and sports. I got one of my guys to run Cross Country, but it was hard for him to make it to morning practices, so he had to quit. As you know, I barely make it to practice on time in the mornings because I have to take the light rail. I think another one of my guys will be joining the lacrosse team. Miguel [freshman participant in John's small group] is on the Wrestling team, and he's pretty good.

John – as he stated - did not join sports or clubs his ninth-grade year. Coming back to Brophy for his sophomore year, John did join the Cross Country team, and he now runs Cross Country and Track. He is considered one of the elite runners in the state, and he will be attending a prestigious university in the fall on an athletic scholarship.

***Academic Strategies.*** The program focused on giving the freshmen advice and support on how to better navigate their studies and grades. Study habits and ways to better communicate with teachers were an important focal point at the lunch meetings. With respect to the program, Max commented,

At Brophy, when I run into trouble this tells me that I wasn't fully paying attention to the procedures or the task that is given. I thought it was good that I could text Tim [student mentor]. He took Mr. Miller's [freshmen Biology teacher] class four years ago. He told me that going in for help in the morning really helped him, and it helped me too. Instead of giving up, I started getting B's on his tests.

Andy, a ninth-grade participant, further stated,

This last semester when grades came out, I was an A and B student. My grades started off so bad. I felt proud of that because I was not sure if I was capable of it. Learning little things like how to check mybropy and my teacher's webpage from Daniel [student mentor] helped. I even studied for tests with Daniel in the mornings.

The senior student leader Daniel commented on this matter when he said, I helped a couple of my guys study for their biology tests. That was fun. They had the same teacher who was my teacher when I was a freshman. I remember most of it, and I think I helped them a lot because they started doing better on her [the biology teacher's] tests.

In terms of academic strategies, Juan added,

It was kind of weird in the beginning of the program, but the environment of Brophy changes you. I felt like I could spill all the stress and trouble of my life in the classroom because I had Roberto [student mentor]. I texted him almost every day, and I still mostly do. I have failed a couple of times to turn in homework. I



have kind of stressed myself out, but I always try to bounce back as quickly as I could. I email the teacher and hope that I get an extension to my due date or get excused by the teacher to make up the work. Roberto taught me that and a lot of things. Plus, he asks me about my grades and homework. I don't like telling him I didn't get something done.

Gilberto mentioned this about his transition, "The program also helped me get friends and those friends got me more friends, and it also helped me change my communication skills. Now, I can talk to a teacher in a cordial manner."

Some of my notes for these meetings consisted of me writing the expression "Oh," down multiple times. The freshmen participants seemed to say "oh" a lot in these lunchtime meetings. To me, I was noticing the "Ah ha" moments that I learned about early on in my education classes when I was first training to become a teacher. What I surmised was that a lot of what I and especially the senior student leaders mentioned to or taught the freshmen was extremely intuitive – it was just that they needed to hear the information one time from someone they respected and trusted. When the senior student leaders spoke, the freshmen listened intently, especially when it came to classes they were struggling in like biology. Little pieces of advice like, "Study a little every night," or "Go talk to the teacher if you don't understand something" were important for the ninth-graders to hear, and I think they really listened to their senior mentors the most because these were guys who took the same class a few years ago and, frequently, had the same teacher.

***Social Transition.*** Another focus of the innovation was providing strategies on how to transition socially to Brophy. The program additionally provided freshmen with a “built-in” group of peers who were all experiencing much of the same things. These students came to Brophy from public schools and did not know many other Brophy students as their ninth-grade school years began. These students became friends.

Juan remarked, “Participating in the program has kept me open to new friends and experiences. I am able to connect to people more often than I possibly would have if I didn’t participate in the program.”

Another freshman, Andy commented, “Since I did not have a base group of friends I could hang with when school started, I was nervous, but making new friends in the program wasn’t a big thing.”

Max added the following comment with respect to social transition,

Participating in all the activities that I have participated in has changed my feeling here at Brophy. It has done so because the main focus of all the activities that I have done is to be there for others and to be a respectful young man. It has helped me make friends.

Anthony related, “I wouldn’t say I’m 100% comfortable, but I’m getting there. My friends have helped for sure.”

Jesus commented on trying out for a team: “John [student mentor] told me I should join a sport. I found out that Brophy had a lacrosse team, and I learned how to play. Those guys are my friends too now.”

Jesus's student mentor John discussed how he transitioned socially when he first came to Brophy when he said,

I never thought of coming to Brophy. My middle school class was divided. You either went to North, or you went to Camelback. Those were the closest public high schools and the most realistic choice for kids in our district/school. So naturally, all my friends were going to Camelback and North. Brophy was never a real option. It was just a thing that seemed too far out of reach. The chances at the time of a kid like me getting accepted were like the chances of a fish living on land. When I did get in, I was really happy, but no other students came from my school. It was a bit scary for me in my first days as a freshman because of that. I wish I had something like this program to help me, but luckily, I was able to make friends, and I got used to this great school.

Miguel, a freshman participant in John's cohort, said this about his social transition to the school: "My proudest moment was when I joined the wrestling team since I felt a part of something bigger and that I was supporting the school. John told me to join something because he didn't join anything his freshman year."

Roberto, a senior student leader, mentioned this about how to best transition socially to Brophy.

Brophy should really encourage Hispanic ninth-graders to join clubs like *Hermanos Unidos*, a club at Brophy for Hispanic students. This club really makes Hispanic students feel at home at Brophy. It has really helped me feel comfortable and make friends. This was something I told my freshmen to join. A

specific disadvantage I faced personally my first year was not knowing many people which made it awkward for me in certain classes. At my middle school, everyone was of one ethnicity, Hispanic. When I first got to Brophy, I felt a kind of culture shock. My freshmen joined it, and I see them at the meetings now.

Taken together, the qualitative results clearly provided evidence that the students and mentors valued the program and its components, which aided them in making the transition to Brophy Prep. In particular, it was clear freshman participants (a) felt they were connected to the school; (b) developed some skills related to effort and perseverance; and (c) acquired some strategies and abilities for making academic and social transitions to Brophy Prep.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

Upon concluding my cycle of research, the word that characterizes what I have seen is agentic. I see freshmen who participated in my innovation now have a better sense of agency for dealing with all kinds of matters at Brophy. I observe that they see Brophy, not as something foreign, but as theirs. A big part of my rationale for beginning this research was to determine whether the retention rates of Hispanic students who come to Brophy from low SES backgrounds could be increased. That data is still to come and will not be available until the closing of the school year. That is something that I'll explore at the end of this year and in future iterations of research. Because the 16 students who participated in the innovation are still in my classroom, I am continually able to anecdotally assess the program's ongoing results. I think "so far so good." The students are all passing my class, and I see them more and more taking responsibility for their actions and thus, demonstrating agency in their academic careers at Brophy. Additionally, their student mentors are still a part of their lives as I continue to hear about them texting their senior student mentors, and to my delight, the seniors text them right back with all the advice and support that the freshmen need.

In the following sections, I provide a discussion on the findings based on the data gleaned from the twelve-week cycle of research and thoughts for the future as I seek to discover additional ways to better support Hispanic students who come to Brophy.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The results of this study include findings related to changes in how comfortable students felt on the Brophy campus, their growth in how they reacted to failure, and the changes of the perceptions of the ninth-graders regarding their abilities to navigate the Brophy campus both academically and socially. In this next section, the qualitative data results will be focused on more so than the quantitative data results, most of which had very low reliabilities. Thus the emphasis will be on explaining the qualitative interview data in the three aforementioned sections.

**Changes in the feelings of connectedness and comfort on campus.** With respect to the feelings of comfort and connectedness on the Brophy campus, the qualitative data show freshmen who participated in the innovation feel more connected to their school and more comfortable on campus than they did prior to the program. These outcomes are consistent with the earlier research of McMillan and Chavis (1986) and their Sense of Community theory. Recall, McMillan and Chavis defined the theory using four elements: (a) membership, (b) influence, (c) integration and fulfillment of needs, and (d) emotional connection. The qualitative interview data from the student participants points towards (a) membership and (d) emotional connection being most important to them. There is a consistency in their interview responses as they describe their participation in the program helping them to feel they are more a part of Brophy. These students come to Brophy from disparate public schools and some of whom learned of the existence of Brophy with only a few months left in their grammar school careers. By comparison, consider those students who come to Brophy having had fathers who

attended the school or with parents who've been pushing their sons to go to the private Jesuit school since they were in kindergarten. This latter group of students knows Brophy, has more than likely spent time on the campus in its summer school program, and may have also been cheering on its sports teams for years. These students feel comfortable on campus on their first day of school. The participants in this study—for the most part—did not. Thus, it is heartening to hear them talk about ideas of membership in their new school. Additionally, participants describe—almost uniformly—an emotional connection with the school. I say this because they all seem to have achieved an emotional connection with their senior student mentors. This simple connection helps participants to feel more comfortable on campus; they feel an emotional connection to the entire institution *vis-a-vis* their student mentor. Thus, the intervention including the work of the mentors suggests a successful program. By comparison, in previous years, former ninth-grade students may have left the school because they felt they did not connect to or relate with students like themselves on campus. It is noteworthy that establishing one new bond with an elder student on campus could foster more comfortable feelings in an environment that may have been foreign to these students just a few weeks prior.

**Changes in the ways students reacted to failure.** One of my hopes as the action researcher in this program is that I could impart in the participants that it is okay to fail. All freshmen at Brophy experience some sort of failure over the course of their first year at the school. I like to think that Brophy is a “soft” place to experience failure. What I mean by that is that the school is a safer place to fail than the “real world,” and thus, it is

okay to try new things without an expectation of experiencing immediate success. An important tenet of the school is that trying new things and experiencing failure leads to growth. We ask our students to continually be open to growth. Participants articulate in their post-intervention interviews that they experience different levels of failure and grow from these experiences. Another way of putting it is that they demonstrate grit.

Duckworth's (2016) research shows that to find success one must not be the smartest or the strongest physically, one must show grit in the face of adversity. Duckworth's book is a collection of stories that show that responding to failure positively in life can make all the difference between ultimate success and failure. The common denominator is that all people experience instances of failure throughout their lives; it is the different ways that people respond to their failures that defines them. The participants in the study discuss academic, social, and athletic failures and how they learn to respond to them. Thus, discussing failure on the front-end – hypothetically before any sort of adversity was experienced – readied the participants for the failure they would experience, and this allows them to deal with the challenging times more readily. A readiness to fail and the skills to adapt to those failures enables participants to have a more positive experience as they encounter challenges during the twelve-week program. Moreover, participants can find strength in these moments because they realize that setbacks do not equal ultimate failures and this affords a more positive experience overall at the school.

**Changes in how the students navigated the Brophy campus, especially in terms of social and academic strategies.** Bourdieu's (1977) cultural capital theory was one of the first and foundational theories for me as I started this research project.



Based on the results from the study, it is clear that students develop cultural capital appropriate to the educational and social systems of the school.

Mullis, Rathge, and Mullis (2003) describe cultural capital in more tangible ways, and this spoke more to what the students are experiencing. Initially, what Hispanic students who come to Brophy from low-SES backgrounds may lack can be deemed something like 'Brophy capital.' Another way of putting this is that they lack skills that may be necessary to successfully navigate Brophy because the school was so new to them. Again, picture the ninth-grader whose father or older brothers have attended the school. These students have spent hours on campus prior to them enrolling as freshmen. Some of the participants in my study spent only minutes, and some learned about the school late in their eighth-grade years when they had decided to attend their local public high schools. To them, Brophy is initially seen as this immense and foreign campus on which they feel lost as school begins.

The program helps to make the school more manageable with basic and pragmatic school navigation skills. Ideas like: how to check grades online, how to advocate for oneself with teachers, how to make friends, and how to best budget time to get all this new found homework done are small, but essential skills in making the school more navigable. Still, learning about these skills in a lunch-time, classroom setting is superseded by having a senior student mentor to turn to and text when questions arose relating to Brophy capital. Students discuss this as being invaluable. Moreover, they continue to be in contact with their student mentors to this day. It would interesting to determine whether the navigation skills spoken about in the program meetings would

have taken hold or had an influence without the immediate ability to text their more experienced senior peers to help put these skills into action. I expect the influence would not have been as profound. The most influential part of the program is participants having mentors and, more so, the opportunity for the freshmen to text their senior mentors in times of need. To me, this is the most influential outcome from the innovation. The ability to connect via social media, which represents the medium that teenagers are most comfortable using, fostered the school navigation skills of the student participants, increased their levels of comfort and connectedness on campus, and advanced accountability of the ninth-grade participants by building grit and a determination that they did not want to fail in the eyes of their more-experienced, peer mentors.

### **Limitations**

There are several factors that serve as limitations in this study and may have influenced the outcomes. Most of these factors are time-related in one way or another. The first limitation is the length of the overall intervention. The overall program is a mere 12 weeks. If it is possible, I would like to work with the 16 freshmen over the course of an entire school year. In that way, I could compare their overall freshman year experiences with students not participating in the support program. Data like comparative GPAs and retention rates at the closing of the school year would be something that I would really like to examine. Retention rates are the primary rationale for me to conduct these cycles of research in the first place. Instead of having those retention data, my 12-week cycle of research only allows me to glean qualitative data on

their perceptions of the support that they receive. This is a good beginning, but the key in the future will be examining how a similar innovation influences actual retention rates.

Each individual, content-area intervention focus (e.g., grit, school navigation, etc.) lasted only three weeks. This limitation is also time-related, but this one, I'll deem focus. Because I only had three weeks for each content-area intervention focus, I wasn't able to go into some of the depth within each skill. Actually, each of these three-week cycles is only a single week of me teaching the skill. The other two weeks are spent with the student mentor in a small group and in a week of reflection. I think it is important to spend more than one lunch period on ideas of grit and some of the individual school-navigation skills, but it was not possible within this time frame. Also, I would have liked to return to these skills. I would like to revisit something like grit at another time with the participants, but for the purpose of the study, I was perpetually moving on to the next idea or theme. Over the course of a school year, I would be able to continually revisit important ideas presented in previous weeks. Also, in terms of ideas like connectedness, my ability to work with the students for a full year would have better shown the students my commitment to them and their having a positive freshman year experience.

With more time, results may be even more powerful. There is value in what is gleaned from the qualitative research, even in this short amount of time, but one can assume it would have become more powerful over the course of an entire year. If time is not an issue, I would interview each of the participants something like a year after their participation in the innovation. Better yet, I would interview them again as they were readying for their graduation from the school four years later. As I conducted my work, I

find the student mentors have much to say in their interviews simply because they are older and not necessarily “in the moment” as the freshmen are in this study.

The quantitative pre- and post-intervention surveys might provide stronger data if given at the onset of a school year in August and again at the end in May. This might provide stronger assessments of the effects of the intervention because there would be more time for students to exhibit growth. It might always, though, be a challenge to gather reliable quantitative data with ninth graders. When they are first presented with a survey of this type, they are so new to campus. They do not know – in a sense – what they do not know. As a result, they might not be able, at this early stage in their Brophy careers, to admit or express that they are struggling, feel out of place, or feel overwhelmed. Another idea would be first giving the quantitative survey to the freshmen sometime in October, possibly sometime after one of the first grade checks. That would probably still be early enough in the school year if I were to give the survey again at the closing of the year in May. Certainly, it would be much longer than the 12 weeks I had in between my pre- and post-intervention surveys for this innovation. In that respect, the data may better exhibit ‘growth.’

Additionally, in retrospect, use of a 4-point Likert scale for some of the surveys is not well-suited to this kind of research. At the post-intervention assessment, some students rated themselves a “4” on all items on the scale. Given these maximum scores, reliabilities could not be determined. In subsequent work, use of a 6-point, Likert scale is warranted.

Finally, a limitation in this cycle of research is that I did not connect my pre- and post-intervention survey data to individual students. My survey was given anonymously, and thus, I was not able to conduct certain kinds of data analyses that would allow me to better understand and interpret the survey responses. This was a limitation this time around. On the other hand, it did allow for the students to anonymously respond to the survey questionnaire.

### **Implications for Practice**

I have so much more research to do, and so the implications for my personal practice are myriad. I believe there are some school-wide implications as well, but they are all in a nascent stage because I have so much more to study before I can take anything to the whole-school level.

I plan on doing much more with this next year. This past year, I studied 16 freshmen, and next year, I hope to expand that number. Another direction I could take this would be to select another 16 ninth-graders for next year and work with them for the entire school year as opposed to 12 weeks. In future years, as I develop and extend these efforts, I would like to increase the number of freshmen participants *and* work with them in a program of support over the course of their entire ninth-grade years.

When I extend these efforts, I will additionally match new freshmen with senior student mentors. I really think this is the most powerful outcome from the current cycle of research. The ability to feel connected to someone who is almost your age and has recently gone through and found success in what you are attempting is something of great value to the freshmen. Each year, it will be a process to find senior students for this

program, but as I have stated, since I teach most of these great students when they were freshmen, and I stay in touch with them around campus as they continue on at Brophy, this will not be a big challenge. Again, this is a school where students enjoy helping others, and this was abundantly clear as I recruited seniors for this cycle of research. As I think about mentoring, I anticipate that a one-to-one match up of freshmen and seniors would be of value. I also anticipate that a program like this would benefit other freshmen. Moreover, on a school-wide basis, could this be of benefit to a wider swath of students? I realize that I am not there yet, but I am excited to move forward in that direction, starting next year with – at the very least – a program of support for a selected group of Hispanic students from low-SES backgrounds over the course of a full school year.

### **Implications for Future Research**

In terms of future research, I think my future research could draw upon the work of researchers like Zimmerman and Pintrich and De Groot, who have all studied self-regulated learning. Zimmerman (1990) wrote this of self-regulated learners: “Self-regulated learners are aware when they know a fact or possess a skill and when they do not” (p. 4). I anticipate that my support program innovation enables my freshmen participants to become more self-regulated in their studies and in the way they view their roles in the learning process. Nevertheless, I need to examine this a bit more closely in future implementations of the innovation. Again, I come back to the word agentic here. I want to foster agency in participants and explore this more fully.

Zimmerman did an interesting investigation with students he deemed on the “advanced academic track” and those he referred to as being on “lower” tracks. Zimmerman’s (1990) findings indicate lower-track students provide responses that indicate they did not understand or use self-regulated behavior in the same way the advanced academic track students do. I can envision building on this point in my future research.

Pintrich and De Groot (1990) furthered this point on self-regulated learners: “Knowledge of cognitive and metacognitive strategies is usually not enough to promote student achievement; students must also be motivated to use the strategies as well” (p. 33). To me, this is where my group of senior student mentors becomes important. In terms of future research, I would like to gather more direct data that points to the ‘accountability’ of having a mentor at Brophy as a factor that pushes the freshmen to grow as self-regulated learners. I would like to examine more carefully how the mentors’ work facilitated use of self-regulated learning strategies, which freshmen learned in the program. It is one thing to learn these strategies, but knowing that the student mentors would be checking up on their protégés is something that extends in a powerful way the use of the strategies. In future research, I would like to examine how and to what extent ‘accountability to the mentor’ who asks questions about their grades and overall academic and social transitions influences freshmen as they begin to take ownership of their learning.

Additionally, in future surveys, I would add questions about mentorships and its effectiveness and influence.

### **Personal Lessons Learned**

All of these efforts related to this study and the preceding cycles of action research are so personal for me because they remind me of how I arrived at this problem and how I have grown as a researcher and a person. The wonderful students that I teach year after year become my friends. I enjoy receiving emails from graduates who I taught years ago as they keep me abreast of their accomplishments. For instance, one student is



now in the online computer security program at Grand Canyon University. A second is graduating from the police academy. Another wants me to come see him as he is proud of his new job working at Starbucks, and I will soon. I hope I am not being selfish, but I want more of these. As I reflect on these instances, I recognize that more can only be achieved if I continue and expand the support of young Hispanic students at Brophy with the program I first explored in this dissertation in practice study. I have learned through this program and innovation some ways to accomplish this, and thus, I am very, very happy.

Specifically from this program, I have learned that for all my planning, for all my speeches, and for all my desires to teach these students ways to succeed at Brophy, I have learned that having someone to reach out to in times of need means everything. I am happy if this person is me. I will ‘reach back’ immediately every time. Still, I have noticed the ‘most authentic’ help came about through the senior-to-freshman, mentor-protégé relationship. Actually, I should not be surprised by this, though it is something that is a bit foreign to me: much of the help and support came via text messaging. It makes perfect sense, but it is not something that I considered as I initially developed and implemented the program. Initially, I anticipated it would be my efforts such as giving bold lunchtime speeches about grit. And although those discursive efforts played a role, the part that appears to be most helpful to the freshmen is having a mentor with whom they can ‘talk’ via text. Being able to text someone who is about your age, but who is a bit older and more experienced really mattered. Being able to reach out to someone with an actual question about biology homework really mattered. I think participants’ knowing

they could reach out to someone with a question about school, homework, or anything really is something that mattered to these freshmen.

I have now learned that for all of the freshmen's' bold assertions that "they've got this," or "they're doing fine," freshmen valued having someone who is there for them at moment's notice. Looking back to my high school career, I would have appreciated this as well. My mom would always ask me how I was doing or how my day went, and I would invariably answer, I'm fine. I did make it through Brophy, but I was not always fine. I would have appreciated having someone who had a similar set of personal experiences like mine who I was able to reach out to with a question.

I learned senior student mentors are not bothered by texts or questions from their freshmen protégés. This surprised me a bit, but I did not hear anything about receiving too many texts or being annoyed or anything like that. It was quite the opposite, and most, if not all mentors, are still in touch with their freshmen although we are weeks past the program. I expect they are so willing to help others because they went through all of this just a few years ago, and they did not have a peer like this to reach out to for help. Although others left Brophy because of low grades or being unable to fit into the school culture, they made it, and I think they enjoy sharing the wisdom they have garnered from their time at the school. It is fun to be an expert on something, and these seniors are experts on successfully 'making it at Brophy.' The four seniors who participated in the program were students I taught when they were ninth graders, and I hope they will send me emails from respective colleges after they have graduated and move on in a few months. I will have to hold off on the texts because I am just not that tech savvy – it is

something about those small buttons on the phone. Perhaps, learning how to text might be ‘my next research innovation.’ The texting limitations notwithstanding, I feel fortunate to have learned all these new lessons personally, and I feel that I am more at a beginning point with all of this than at an end point.

## **Conclusion**

This innovation, this initial program to support Hispanic freshmen students from low SES backgrounds is over. That having been said, I will use the lessons I have learned from it going forward each and every year *ad infinitum*. Even if this approach is not adopted as a uniform practice at Brophy for freshmen, I will use it informally in my own teaching and interactions with my students. Having a mentor that you can reach out to when needed is something very powerful. Certainly, it is something that is more available now with the advent of texting. A student up late struggling with homework could text his senior, student mentor. This is something that could not have taken place five or so years ago. Chances are very high the senior mentors will text the freshmen back. This program works because the seniors are, in a sense, and see themselves as the same exact freshmen only a few short years removed. Mentors found ways to navigate the school, they found success at Brophy, and thus, they are the ones who are best able to help struggling freshmen. Additionally, results show these student mentors *love* helping their freshmen protégés. Brophy is a special place where the culture is established so that teachers and students go out of their way to help and support each other. Thus, this innovation readily fits with what is already in place. On the front page of the Brophy website right now is one of Brophy’s mottos, “being a man for others.” This has always

been important for me, and I recognize it being important to the senior student mentors. The freshmen do not know it when they first start at the school, and if they do know it, they may not quite believe it just yet. Nevertheless, a program like this reinforces that we are here to support and build up one another.

Next year, I will implement Tuesday lunch meetings for Hispanic students. I really do not know what I will call it yet. This naming has been tricky for me. Still, I want students to know that they are valued as potential future leaders of Phoenix. I want them to know that their cultures are valued on our campus, and I want them to be proud of who they are. They need to know that they make Brophy better. That they, in fact, are Brophy. I go back and forth myself because I was not proud to be a west-side financial aid student at Brophy. I did not want some of my rich classmates to know that about me. As an adult, though, I am very proud of that fact. In my English classes, I tell all my students about who I am and where I come from, but I understand the other side of the coin in terms of standing out and being recognized as different in one's teenage years. I am going to have to keep thinking about the name.

But still, next year, this program, this innovation, this club will exist. I am blessed to teach most Brophy freshmen during their ninth-grade year at the school, so I know most of the students on campus. I coordinate the work-study students who work to meet requirements of their financial grants each of their four years at Brophy, so I know and keep in touch with our most successful Hispanic students who come from low-SES backgrounds. I am certain that those I choose to ask to help me in this venture will gladly say yes. For my project this year, I worked with 16 students and four senior, student

mentors. Next year, my students in this program will probably not be limited to 16. We have over 100 freshmen on financial aid and almost half of them are Hispanic. I genuinely think I can help all of them, but writing that gives me a reason to pause. I do think the four-to-one ratio of four freshmen per one senior student mentor worked well, but I would like to move it to as close to one-to-one as I can. I have also thought of involving successful juniors in this program as well. If I could match every ninth-grade Hispanic student from a low-SES background with an upperclassmen mentor, I would be pleased. I would run the Tuesday lunch meetings, and my mentors would be there for personal support and advice.

I am sincerely excited for next year. In previous years, I wanted to better serve my low-SES, Hispanic students, but I did not see how to do it. I have struggled with end-of-the-year missives that related to the staff which students have withdrawn from Brophy. I had done my best to anecdotally scrounge together bits and pieces of ways to better help. Now, though, I gathered initial, encouraging data from this research. Research that is not done yet, I must add. I will still consider next year's club on-going action research. The support will be there, but I will still be collecting data because I feel that I have much more to uncover as I implement and monitor the next round of action research. I justifiably proud of this cycle of my research, but I am so excited to continue on with the next cycle. I am excited because I now have a data-driven program to better support these future leaders who I am so honored and fortunate to teach.

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## APPENDIX A

### ADAPTED VERSION OF BRIEF SENSE OF COMMUNITY SCALE



### Adapted Version of Brief Sense of Community Scale

Adapted from Peterson, Speer, and McMillan (2008)

1. I can get what I need in this school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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2. This school helps me fulfill my needs.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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3. I feel like a member of this school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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4. I belong to this school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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5. I have a say about what goes on in this school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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6. Students in this school are good at influencing each other.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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7. I feel connected to this school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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8. I have a good bond with others in this school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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## APPENDIX B

ADAPTED VERSION OF BRIEF CLASSROOM COMMUNITY SCALE —

CONNECTED SCALE ONLY

Adapted Version of Brief Classroom Community Scale — Connected Scale Only

Adapted from Rovai (2002)

1. I feel that students in this school care about each other.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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2. I feel connected to others in this school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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3. I do not feel a spirit of community at school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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4. I feel that this school is like a family.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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5. I feel isolated in this school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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6. I trust others in this school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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7. I feel that I can rely on others in this school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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8. I feel that members of this school depend on me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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9. I feel uncertain about others in this school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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10. I feel confident that others will support me at school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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## APPENDIX C

### GRIT—S, SHORT VERSION OF GRIT SCALE

Grit—S, Short Version of Grit Scale

From Duckworth and Quinn (2009)

1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.

Very much like me

Mostly like me

Somewhat like me

Not much like me

Not like me at all

2. Setbacks (delays and obstacles) don't discourage me. I bounce back from disappointments faster than most people.

Very much like me

Mostly like me

Somewhat like me

Not much like me

Not like me at all

3. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.

Very much like me

Mostly like me

Somewhat like me

Not much like me

Not like me at all

4. I am a hard worker.

Very much like me

Mostly like me

Somewhat like me

Not much like me

Not like me at all

5. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue (follow) a different one.

Very much like me

Mostly like me

Somewhat like me

Not much like me

Not like me at all

6. I have difficulty maintaining (keeping) my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.

Very much like me

Mostly like me

Somewhat like me

Not much like me

Not like me at all

7. I finish whatever I begin.

Very much like me

Mostly like me

Somewhat like me

Not much like me

Not like me at all

8. I am diligent (hard working and careful).

Very much like me

Mostly like me

Somewhat like me

Not much like me

Not like me at all

APPENDIX D

RESEARCHER-CREATED ITEMS ON TRANSITION, STUDY STRATEGIES, AND  
INTERACTING WITH TEACHERS



Researcher-created Items on Transition, Study Strategies, and Interacting with Teachers

1. I know how to find resources here at Brophy to help me make the transition to high school.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

2. I am confident about my “high school navigating skills” that will help me adjust to high school.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

3. When I have a question about making the adjustment to high school, I ask someone who knows (older students, peers, teachers, or staff).

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

4. I ask myself questions to make sure I know the material I have been studying.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

5. When I am reading, I stop once in a while to go over what I have read.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

6. I have good study strategies that I use to complete my assignments.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

7. I have well-developed note taking strategies that I use in class.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

8. When I read something, I put important ideas into my own words, so I can understand it better.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

9. I feel comfortable talking to my teachers about homework assignments.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

10. I feel comfortable speaking to my teachers about my grades.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

11. I am comfortable asking my teachers for help when I don't understand something.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX E

POST-INTERVENTION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Post-intervention Interview Questions

### Interview Questions Related to Sense of Community/Connectedness

1. Describe how “connected” you feel to Brophy. Has participating in the program changed your feeling of being connected? If so, how?
2. Describe how comfortable you feel at Brophy. Has participating in the program changed your feeling of being comfortable? If so, how?

### Interview Questions Related to Grit

3. Describe how you’ve reacted to failure at Brophy. What did you do?
4. Describe a time when you achieved a goal at Brophy.

### Interview Questions Related to Transition, Classroom Success, and Self-efficacy

5. How are you adjusting to the academic/class demands at Brophy? What has helped in making that transition? How did it help?
6. How are you adjusting to the social aspects of being at Brophy? What has helped in making that transition? How did it help?
7. Based on what you learned as you participated in the program, how have you changed your approach to studying?
8. Describe strategies you use for doing homework at Brophy. Have those changed because of the program? If so, how?
9. Describe a time when you had to speak to a teacher about a homework assignment or a grade. What did you do? How did it go?

10. Describe a time when you had a question for the teacher about the material in a class.

What did you do? How did it go? Did participating in the training change you handled this situation? If so, how?

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE PERMISSION LETTERS

Sample Permission Letters  
Parental Letter of Permission

Dear Parent:

I am a student in the Doctoral Program at Arizona State University. I am working under the direction of Dr. Ray Buss, Associate Professor in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College. I am conducting a research study to examine how to better support students at Brophy during their freshman year of high school.

I am inviting your son to participate in a twelve-week program to help him make the transition to attending Brophy. Your son's participation in this program is voluntary. In the program, he will have opportunities to learn some skills to make the transition to Brophy easier for him. If you choose not to have your son participate, there will be no penalty. Likewise, if your son chooses not to participate in the interview, there will be no penalty. If you give permission and your son also agrees to participate in the mentoring part of the study, he will be expected to participate in the research part of the study.

In this twelve-week program, I will:

- Have him fill out a survey,
- Work with him in large groups at lunch,
- Ask him do some writing of journal reflections,
- Have him work with a Brophy senior as a mentor, and
- Interview him.

He will take a survey before and after the program. The survey will take 10-12 minutes each time.

He will meet with either me or his Brophy senior mentor on Tuesdays at lunch during the twelve-week program

He will write in a journal for approximately five minutes per week.

He will participate in a final interview with me after this program that will last 10-15 minutes.

The twelve-week program will include four cycles covering four topics including (a) transition to Brophy, (b) involvement in the Brophy community, (c) study skills 1, and (d) study skills. Each cycle will be three weeks long. In the first week, your son will meet with me in a large group to discuss the topic and learn some skills about it. Then, in the second week, your son will meet in a small group with a Brophy senior to continue the discussion and learn some skills about the topic from a student's perspective. Finally, in the third week, your son will meet in a large group to summarize and discuss what they have learned about the topic. This three-week procedure will be used for each of the four topics.

You or your son may be wondering about privacy and confidentiality. The surveys, journal writing responses, and interview responses used in the research will be kept confidential and will not be labeled with your son's name. Interviews will be conducted at school away from other students to ensure confidentiality. I would like to audio record the interviews, so I can examine the data more closely. I will not record the interview without your permission and your son's agreement. Upon transcription of the interviews, identifiers will be removed and audio tapes will be deleted. Transcriptions will be



destroyed after three years. The results of this study may be used in a dissertation, reports, presentations, or publications but your son's name will not be known/used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or you or your son's participation in it please contact Dr. Ray Buss at (602) 543-6343 or me at (602) 264-5291.

Sincerely,

Steve Smith, Doctoral Student

Ray Buss, Associate Professor

By signing below, I agree to allow my son to participate in the program and research study at Brophy.

_____	_____	_____
Signature	Printed Name	Date

If you have any questions about you or your son's rights as a participant in this research study, or if you feel you or your son has been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Ray Buss and Arizona State University at (602) 543-6343 or the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

## Spanish Translation of Parental Letter of Permission

### Permiso de los padres

Querido padre:

Soy un estudiante en el Programa Doctoral de Arizona State University. Estoy trabajando bajo la dirección del Dr. Ray Buss, Profesor Asociado de la Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College. Estoy haciendo un estudio para investigar como mejor apoyar a los estudiantes en Brophy durante su primer año de preparatoria.

Le invito a su hijo para participar en un programa de 12 semanas para ayudarlo en su transición asistiendo a Brophy. La participación de su hijo será voluntaria. En el programa, tendrá la oportunidad de aprender cómo hacer su transición más fácil a Brophy. Si decide no dejar a su hijo participar, no habrá ninguna penalización. Igual que si su hijo decide no participar, no habrá ninguna penalización. Si le da permiso y su hijo esté de acuerdo para participar en la parte de mentor del estudio, tendrá la expectativa de participar en investigación del estudio.

En este programa de 12 semanas, conmigo va a:

Hacer una encuesta,

Trabajar con un grupo grande durante el almuerzo,

Escribir en un cuaderno para reflexionar,

Trabajar con un estudiante de Brophy de cuarto año y entrevistarle.

Hará una encuesta al inicio y al final del programa. La encuesta tardará 10 a 12 minutos cada vez.

Se juntará conmigo o con su mentor de cuarto año los martes durante el almuerzo en el

programa de 12 semanas.

Escribirá en un cuaderno por aproximadamente cinco minutos cada semana.

Participará en una entrevista al final de este programa que tardará unos 10 a 15 minutos.

Este programa de 12 semanas incluirá cuatro ciclos sobre cuatro temas incluyendo (a) transición a Brophy, (b) su participación en la comunidad de Brophy, (c) disciplina de estudios 1, y (d) disciplina de estudios 2. Cada ciclo será de tres semanas. En la primera semana, su hijo se juntará conmigo en un grupo para hablar sobre el tema y aprender maneras de mejorar. Luego, en la segunda semana, su hijo se juntará en un grupo con un estudiante de cuarto año para continuar la discusión y aprender cómo mejorar con la perspectiva de un estudiante. Finalmente, en la tercera semana, su hijo se juntará con un grupo para discutir y resumir lo que aprendieron sobre el tema. Este procedimiento de tres semanas se usará por cada uno de los cuatro temas.

Usted o su hijo igual tienen preguntas sobre la privacidad y confidencialidad. Las respuestas del cuaderno y de la entrevista que se usará para el estudio se mantendrá confidencial y no se usará el nombre de su hijo. Para las encuestas, los estudiantes usarán un modo de identificación que solo sabrán ellos. El modo de identificación consistirá de las primeras tres letras de la madre del estudiante y los últimos cuatro números de su número de teléfono. Por ejemplo, Mar 0789 sería el código de un estudiante quien su madre fuera Mary y quien tuviera el número de teléfono 523-0789. Las entrevistas se harán en la escuela en privado para asegurar confidencialidad. Me gustaría grabar las entrevistas para poder examinar los resultados con más tiempo. No grabaré la entrevista sin su permiso y sin que esté de acuerdo su hijo. Después de transcribir las entrevistas,

los nombres y las grabaciones se borrarán. Transcripciones se destruirán después de tres años. Los resultados de los estudios se podrán usar en una tesis, reporte, presentación, o publicación, pero el nombre de su hijo no se usará.

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre este estudio o por la participación de su hijo, por favor llame al Dr. Ray Buss at (602) 543-6343 o llámame a mí (623) 264-5291.

Sinceramente,

Steve Smith, Estudiante del Doctorado

Ray Buss, Profesor Asociado

Firmando abajo, estoy de acuerdo con permitir a mi hijo participar en el programa y estudio en Brophy.

\_\_\_\_\_ Firma

Nombre

Fecha

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre los derechos de su hijo como participante en este estudio, o si siente que su hijo se haya puesto en una situación arriesgada, puede ponerse en comunicación con el Dr. Ray Buss y Arizona State University llamando al (602) 543-6343 o al Director de the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, atreves de la Oficina de Integridad de Estudios y Seguranza, llamando al (480) 965-6788.

## Letter of Permission for Student Mentor

Dear Parent:

I am a student in the Doctoral Program at Arizona State University. I am working under the direction of Dr. Ray Buss, Associate Professor in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College. I am conducting a research study to examine how to better support students at Brophy during their freshman year of high school.

I am inviting your son to participate as a mentor to assist freshmen to help them make the transition to attending Brophy. Your son's participation in this program is voluntary. If you choose not to have your son participate, there will be no penalty. Likewise, if your son chooses not to participate, there will be no penalty.

If you allow your son to participate, he will assist by leading a small group of four Brophy freshmen in lunch time meetings. He will lead four meetings in the twelve-week program.

Your son will be asked to do three things as a mentor. First, he will meet with a group of four freshmen boys every third week at lunch to discuss four topics including (a) transition to Brophy, (b) involvement in the Brophy community, (c) study skills 1, and (d) study skills 2. I will provide him with materials and coach him on what to do. This mentoring will take about one hour per week and meeting with me will take fifteen minutes each week (a total of about five hours). Second, he will write 5-7.5 minutes in a journal about his experiences when he met with the boys each time (a total of 20-30 minutes). Third, he will participate in a twenty-minute interview at the end of the project.

You or your son may be wondering about privacy and confidentiality. The journal writing responses and interview responses used in the research will be kept confidential and will not be labeled with your son's name. Interviews will be conducted at school away from other students to ensure confidentiality. I would like to audio record the interviews, so I can examine the data more closely. I will not record the interview without your permission and your son's agreement. Upon transcription of the interviews, identifiers will be removed and audio tapes will be deleted. Transcriptions will be destroyed after three years. The results of this study may be used in a dissertation, reports, presentations, or publications but your son's name will not be known/used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or you or your son's participation in it please contact Dr. Ray Buss at (602) 543-6343 or me at (602) 264-5291.

Sincerely,

Steve Smith, Doctoral Student

Ray Buss, Associate Professor

By signing below, I agree to allow my son to participate in the program and research study at Brophy.

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Signature

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Printed Name

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Date

If you have any questions about you or your son's rights as a participant in this research study, or if you feel you or your son has been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Ray Buss and Arizona State University at (602) 543-6343 or the Chair of the Human Subjects

Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.